

AIDS - New Zealand

AIDS AND HIV INFECTION IN NEW ZEALAND TO END OF MARCH 1999

In the first quarter of 1999, there were 9 notifications of AIDS (8 male and one female), while 18 people (12 male and 6 female) were found to be infected with HIV. To the end of March 1999, in total 678 people (645 male and 33 female) have been notified with AIDS, and 1355 people (1186 male, 150 female, and 19 sex not stated) have been found to be infected with HIV.

SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR AMONG MEN WHO HAVE HAD SEX WITH MEN

There were 35 men diagnosed with HIV in New Zealand in the last year who were reported infected through homosexual contact. Of these men, 11 had had a negative HIV antibody test in the previous 5 years indicating that the infection had occurred within that time. Although the rate of newly diagnosed infections among men who had sex with men (MSM) is much lower than in the mid-1980s, new infections continue to occur.

It is important to understand the current behaviour among this group to assist in the development and implementation of HIV prevention programmes.

An important conclusion of recent research, reported here, is that a safe sex culture and open communication are essential to control the HIV epidemic.

Male Call/Waea Mai, Tane Mai study

The first nationwide survey of the sexual behaviour of MSM - the *Male Call/Waea Mai, Tane Mai* study, was undertaken in 1996 by the New Zealand AIDS Foundation with funding from the Health Research Council. Some of the key findings which have been published so far are presented here.

The men interviewed

Men were eligible for inclusion in the study if they had engaged in sex with another man in the last 5 years. The sample comprised those who voluntarily contacted a widely publicised freephone number. The interview took place anonymously over the telephone.

Although it is not possible to randomly select study participants from the whole population of men who have sex with men, the sample included a wide demographic profile of men, both attached and unattached to the gay community. Overall 1852 men from throughout the country provided information. The average age was 34.5 years. Within the sample 9.2% were Maori and 2.6% Pacific Island men. Just over a third of the men were currently, or had previously been, married or in a *de facto* relationship with a woman.

Sex with regular and casual partners

Sexual behaviour, anal sex and condom use, varied with the type of partner. Regular partners were defined as men who they had sex with more than once and they anticipated having sex with again in the near future. Casual partners were those who did not fall into this category.

Anal sex was practised more commonly with a regular partner (76% of the 741 men who had a regular partner for 6 months or more)

than with casual partners (60% of the 1362 men with casual partners).

However condoms were used less often with regular partners (46% never used a condom with a regular partner in the last 6 months) than with casual partners (only 10% of those who had casual sex reported they had never used a condom).

Of the 741 men who reported having a regular partner for 6 months or more, just over half (54%) also had casual sexual partners in the previous 6 months. Of those who had anal sex with both their regular and casual partners (183 men), 5.5% reported that they never used a condom with either partner in that time.

Just over half (55%) of the 1362 men who had casual sex partners in the previous 6 months had had sex with 5 or fewer men in that time, and approximately 5% with 50 or more.

“Highly unsafe sex”

“Highly unsafe sex” - unprotected anal intercourse with a man whose HIV status was unknown or different from the respondent's - was reported by 15% of the whole sample in the previous 6 months.

Maori men who have sex with men

Although Maori in the sample were more likely to be younger, on lower incomes, in semi-skilled work and less likely to feel part of the gay community, they were found to engage in unsafe sex at a similar rate to other groups.

Men who have sex with men and women

Nearly three quarters of the sample had had sex with a woman at some time, and 15% had had sex with both men and women in the previous 6 months. Among this latter group, nearly half (47%) were in a regular sexual relationship with a woman that had lasted 6 months or longer.

Just over half of the men who had had sexual contact with women, either on a regular or casual basis in the previous 6 months, had not told any female sex partners that they had also had sex with men. However men who had had sex with both men and women were more likely than the rest of the sample to have used a condom for anal sex with their male partner.

Men who had sex with men and women were diverse in terms of their stated 'identity'. While some identified themselves as bisexual, others referred to themselves as gay or as heterosexual. Some were attached to the gay community while others were not.

HIV testing

Around 70% of the sample had ever had an HIV test. General practice was the commonest site where the most recent test had been performed, with sexual health clinics and New Zealand AIDS Foundation centres also being used widely.

Other findings

Much more detailed information has been collected and analysed in the *Male Call/Waea Mai, Tane Mai* study. For example, extensive demographic information was collected which has been linked to the various behaviours reported.

Conclusion

The study shows that although the majority of men who have sex with men behave in ways that should minimise the risk of further transmission of HIV, such behaviours are not universal.

A key conclusion of the research team was that it is essential that a safe sex culture and open communication, with both male and female partners, is promoted among men who have sex with men.

For further information on the findings of the *Male Call/Waea Mai, Tane Mai* study contact the New Zealand AIDS Foundation, P.O. Box 6663, Auckland.

NOTIFICATIONS OF AIDS IN NEW ZEALAND IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF 1999

Nine people were notified with AIDS in the first quarter of 1999. Of these 9 people, 8 were male and one was female. One of the people grouped with the males was actually a transsexual.

Of the 8 males, 5 were reported to have had sex with other men, 2 (who were from high prevalence areas) were reported to have been heterosexually infected, and the means of infection for the remaining man could not be determined. The one female notified was reported to have been heterosexually infected overseas in an Asian country which does not have a high prevalence but does have an evolving epidemic.

PEOPLE FOUND TO BE INFECTED WITH HIV IN NEW ZEALAND IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF 1999

In the first quarter of 1999, 18 people were found to be infected with HIV in New Zealand. Of these, 12 were male, and 6 were female

Of the 12 males found to be infected in the first quarter of 1999, 6 were reported to have had sex with men, 3 to have been heterosexually infected overseas, and for one man the means of infection has not been determined. Information is still awaited on 2 men.

All the 6 females found to be infected in the first quarter of 1999 were reported to have been heterosexually infected. One of these was a New Zealander and the other 5 were from overseas. The New Zealand woman had had a sexual partner who had previously lived in a high prevalence area.

AGE OF PEOPLE DIAGNOSED WITH HIV

The age and sex of people diagnosed with HIV are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Age and sex by time of diagnosis for those found to be infected with HIV.

Years	12 months to 31.3.99		Total to 31.3.99		
	Male*	Female	Male*	Female	NS
0-4	0	1	7	7	0
5-14	0	0	6	0	0
15-19	0	2	21	3	0
20-29	17	4	332	69	0
30-39	36	5	432	39	2
40-49	18	3	207	16	1
50-59	6	0	75	4	0
60 or above	1	2	25	5	0
NS	0	0	81	7	16
TOTAL	78	17	1186	150	19

* includes a small number of transsexuals
NS = Not stated

Among men, HIV has been most commonly diagnosed in the age group 30-39, and among women in the age group 20-29. However, 9% of all people were aged 50 years or more at the time of diagnosis, and 2 of the women diagnosed in the last 12 months were over 60 years at that time.

HIV infection needs to be considered by clinicians as a possible cause for immunosuppression in people of any age.

EXPOSURE CATEGORIES AND ETHNICITY OF PEOPLE NOTIFIED WITH AIDS AND FOUND TO BE INFECTED WITH HIV

Information on the categories of risk, sex and ethnicity, of the 678 people notified as having AIDS and the 1355 people diagnosed with HIV in New Zealand to the end of March 1999 is shown in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2 Exposure category by time for notification of people with AIDS, and by time of diagnosis for those found to be infected with HIV. A small number of transsexuals are included with the males.

Exposure category	Sex	AIDS				HIV Infection*			
		12 months to 31.3.99		Total to 31.3.99		12 months to 31.3.99		Total to 31.3.99	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Homosexual contact	Male	18	58.1	544	80.2	35	36.8	727	53.7
Homosexual contact & IDU	Male	0	0	10	1.5	0	0	13	1.0
Heterosexual contact	Male	4	12.9	34	5.0	28	29.5	93	6.9
	Female	3	9.7	23	3.4	16	16.8	107	7.9
Injecting drug use (IDU)	Male	2	6.5	12	1.8	0	0	31	2.3
	Female	0	0	5	0.7	0	0	8	0.6
Blood product recipient	Male	0	0	15	2.2	0	0	29	2.1
Transfusion recipient	Male	0	0	1	0.2	1‡	1.1	4	0.3
	Female	0	0	1	0.2	0	0	5	0.4
	NS	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0.4
Perinatal	Male	0	0	1	0.2	0	0	5	0.4
	Female	1	3.2	2	0.3	1	1.1	4	0.3
Awaiting information/ undetermined	Male	2	6.5	28	4.1	14	14.7	282	20.8
	Female	1	3.2	2	0.3	0	0	22	1.6
	NS	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	1.0
Other	Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.2
	Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0.3
TOTAL		31	100.0	678	100.0	95	100.0	1355	100.0

NS = Not stated

*Includes people who have developed AIDS

‡Acquired overseas

Table 3 Ethnicity by time of notification for people with AIDS, and by time of diagnosis for those found to be infected with HIV. Information on ethnicity of people found to be infected with HIV is only available since 1996. A small number of transsexuals are included with the males.

Ethnicity	Sex	AIDS				HIV Infection*			
		12 months to 31.3.99		Total to 31.3.99		12 months to 31.3.99		1.1.96 to 31.3.99	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
European/Pakeha	Male	16	51.6	522	77.0	34	35.8	118	42.3
	Female	0	0	20	2.9	2	2.1	13	4.7
Maori †	Male	3	9.7	72	10.6	3	3.2	17	6.1
	Female	0	0	1	0.2	0	0	2	0.7
Pacific Island	Male	2	6.5	15	2.2	1	1.1	3	1.1
	Female	0	0	3	0.4	0	0	3	1.1
Other	Male	5	16.1	29	4.3	33	34.7	67	24.0
	Female	5	16.1	9	1.3	15	15.8	42	15.1
Awaiting information/ undetermined	Male	0	0	7	1.0	7	7.4	13	4.7
	Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.4
TOTAL		31	100.0	678	100.0	95	100.0	279	100.0

NS = Not stated

* Includes people who have developed AIDS

† Includes people who belong to Maori and another ethnic group

For further information about the occurrence of AIDS in New Zealand contact
 Dr Nigel Dickson, AIDS Epidemiology Group, Department of Preventive and Social Medicine,
 University of Otago Medical School, PO Box 913, Dunedin, New Zealand
 Phone: (03) 479 7211, Fax: (03) 479 7298, or Email ndickson@gandalf.otago.ac.nz