



HIGHLIGHTS

- Each year, one in four sexually experienced adolescents is diagnosed with an STI.
- Young women are more susceptible to STIs than men or older women.
- Rates of STIs and AIDS among Latino youth fall between those of non-Latino whites and African Americans.
- One-quarter of new AIDS cases among adolescents occur in Latinos.
- The primary mode of HIV transmission among Latino youth is via sex with an HIV-infected male.
- Late diagnosis, poor access to health care, and lack of treatment contribute to the slow decline of AIDS death rates among Latinos.
- 57% of young Latino adults feel that AIDS is a very serious problem for people they know.

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Background

Each year 4 million adolescents—one in four sexually experienced adolescents—are diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection (STI).¹ While most STIs can be effectively treated when diagnosed, 70% of sexually active teens are not tested,² and an unknown number of undiagnosed cases occur annually. Untreated STIs can lead to increased risks of spreading STIs, as well as reproductive cancers and infertility.^{3,4,5} Teens, females, and ethnic minorities have disproportionately high STI rates.^{3,4} Compared to older women and men, younger women are physiologically more susceptible to STIs,⁵ though they are less likely than males to exhibit symptoms.⁴ Though condom use is increasing among Latinos,⁶ unsafe sexual behavior continues to put them at risk for contracting STIs. Increasing awareness regarding the nature of STIs, methods of prevention, and access to health care services that ensure early detection and treatment can help Latino youth protect their health and fertility and the health of their current and future partners.

Chlamydia

Chlamydia, a curable bacterial STI, is the most commonly reported infectious disease in the US.³ Forty percent of all cases of chlamydia occur in 15 to 19 year olds.³ Latino teens are more likely than non-Latino white teens and less likely than African American youth to be diagnosed with chlamydia (See Figure 1). Infection rates have steadily increased for all teens but at a faster pace for Latino and male youth. Young Latina females are nearly 7 times more likely than Latino males to be diagnosed with chlamydia.⁷

Gonorrhea

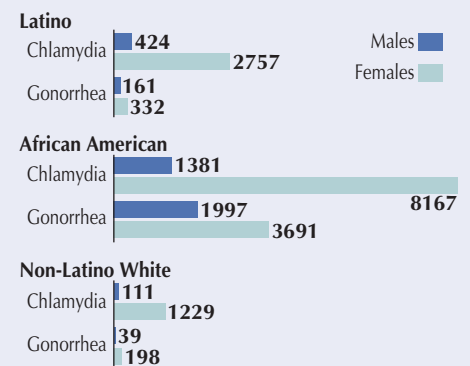
Gonorrhea is a sexually transmitted curable bacterial infection. In 1999, three-fifths (59%) of all gonorrhea cases occurred among youth ages 15-24 and 67% of all gonorrhea cases among 15-19 year old youth occurred among females.⁷ The proportion of Latino teens diagnosed with gonorrhea lies between those of non-Latino whites and African Americans (See Figure 1). From 1995 to 1999, gonorrhea rates decreased across all race and ethnicity groups. For Latino youth ages 15-19, the gonorrhea rate decreased 10% compared to a 26% decrease for African Americans and a 20% decrease for non-Latino white youth. The rate of decrease was slowest among Latina females (5%) and steepest among African American males (38%).⁷

Syphilis

Syphilis is a bacterial STI that progresses in stages.³ It is curable and disease progression is preventable when treated. Once a significant public health concern, syphilis has been nearly eradicated, reaching its lowest levels in two decades.⁴ Outbreaks have recently been reported in several US cities,⁸ predominately among men who have sex with men, though increases in the male-to-female rate ratio are also occurring.³ Syphilis rates for Latino males and females between the ages of 15 to 19 (1.7 and 1.5 per 100,000) fall between the rates for African American (9.5 and 20.1 respec-

FIGURE 1

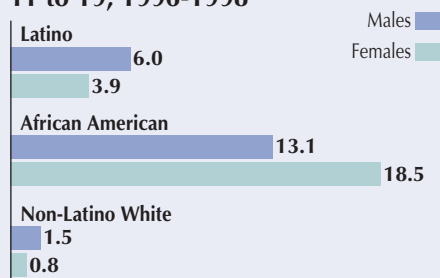
Reported gonorrhea and chlamydia rates per 100,000 adolescents ages 15-19 by gender, 1999



SOURCE: Division of STD Prevention. 1999. Sexually Transmitted Disease Surveillance, 1999. Department of Health and Human Services, Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

tively) and non-Latino white males and females (0.2 and 0.5 respectively) (See Figure 1).⁷ From 1995 to 1999, the syphilis rate among Latino youth decreased by one-third compared to 64% for non-Latino white and 76% for African American youth. Between 1997 and 1999, syphilis rates were stable for non-Latino white adults, declined 29% in African American adults, and increased 20% in Latino adults (primarily among males).³

FIGURE 2

AIDS rates per 100,000 youth ages 11 to 19, 1996-1998

SOURCE: National Center for STD, HIV, and TB Prevention. 1998. Sexually Transmitted Disease Surveillance, 1998. Department of Health and Human Services, Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The Impact of HIV/AIDS on Latino Adolescents and Adults

Half of all new HIV infections are estimated to occur among those under age 25.⁹ AIDS rates among Latino youth fall between African American and non-Latino white rates (See Figure 2).¹⁰ One-quarter (24%) of new AIDS cases among adolescents ages 13 to 19 occur in Latinos.⁹ Among Latinos, men account for the vast majority (81%) of AIDS cases, though infections are increasing among Latinas.¹¹ The primary mode of HIV exposure for Latino male and female adolescents is sex with HIV-infected males; injection drug use is the second most common route.¹¹

Due to advances in treatment, death rates among people with HIV/AIDS declined throughout the 1990s. However, the rate of decline among Latinos and African Americans has been slower than among non-Latino whites.¹² This is due to a variety of factors such as poor access to health care, late diagnosis and lack of treatment. Latino adults with AIDS are more likely than African American and non-Latino white adults to lack health insurance (24%, 22% and 16% respectively), and Latinos (45%) and African Americans (44%) are more likely to get tested late in their illness than non-Latino whites (34%).¹² Latinos and African Americans living with HIV/AIDS are also more likely to report competing needs and barriers to health care than are non-Latino whites (such as debilitating illness and lack of transportation).¹²

Communication about STIs and HIV/AIDS

Most sexually experienced teens have never discussed STIs with a health care provider,² although the majority have been taught about HIV/AIDS. Fewer Latino (81%) and African American students (86%) report being taught about HIV/AIDS in school than non-Latino whites (91%).⁶ Latino (61%) and non-Latino white students (62%) are less likely to talk about HIV/AIDS with an adult or family member than are African American students (73%).¹³ Yet, young Latino adults between the ages of 18 and 24 (57%) are more likely than the general population (39%) to feel that AIDS is a very serious problem for people they know.¹⁴

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Fact Sheet on Latino Youth: STIs & HIV/AIDS

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