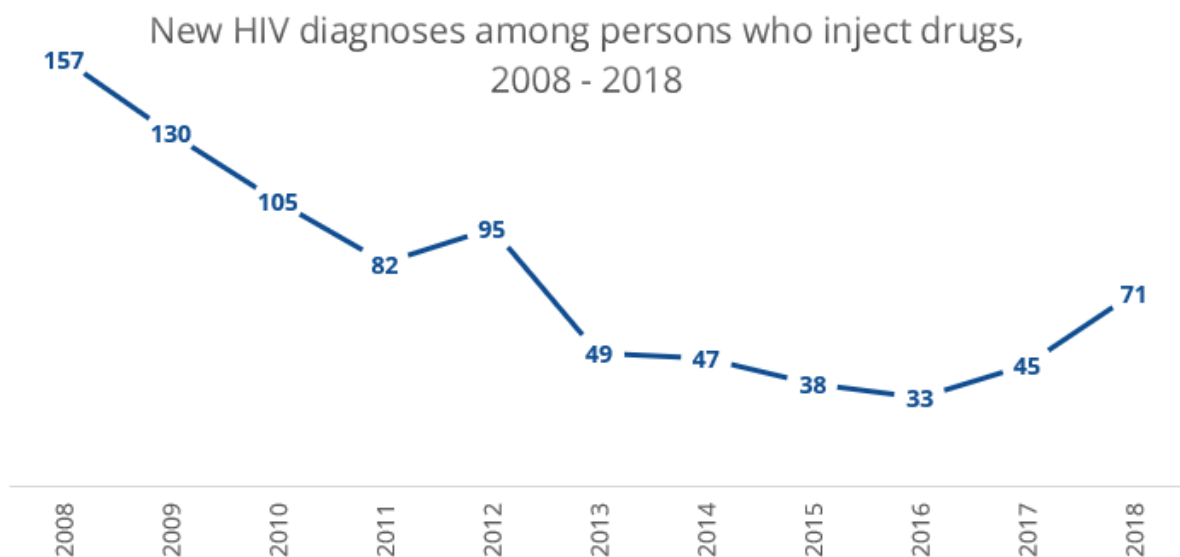




HIV Continues to Spread Among People Who Inject Drugs

This issue of CHART provides an update on the ongoing HIV outbreak among people who inject drugs in Philadelphia.

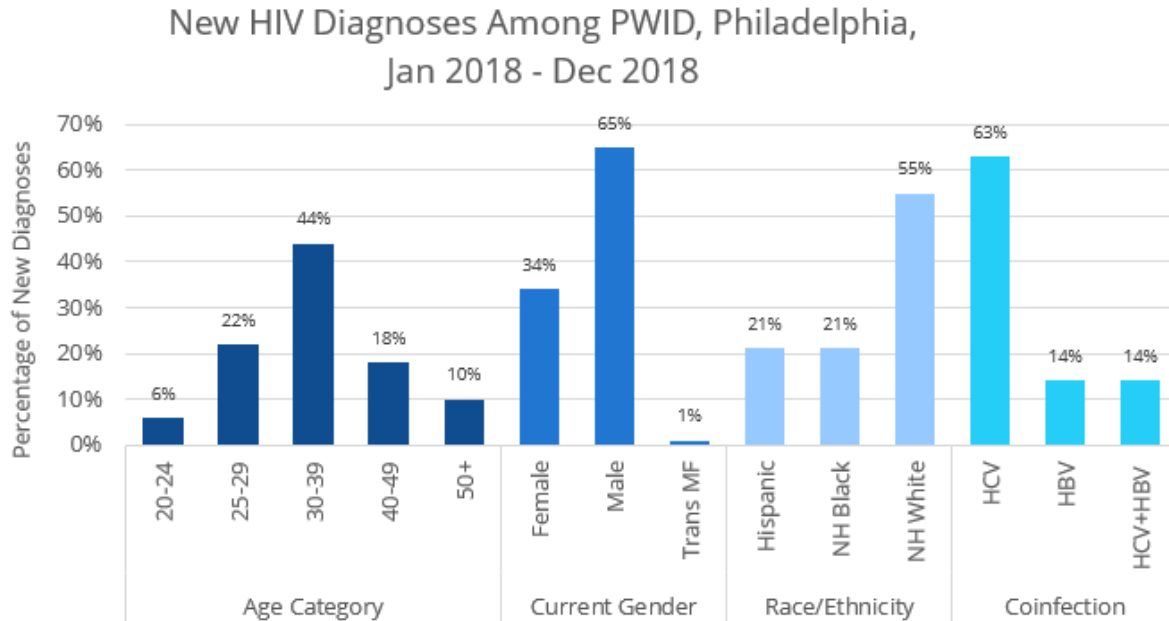
HIV infections among individuals who inject drugs continue to increase



*Footnote: Changes in Philadelphia's HIV reporting regulations in 2012 may have impacted data for that year.

- The number of new HIV infections among people who inject drugs, including injectors who have sex with men, in Philadelphia had been falling since the implementation of the syringe exchange program in 1992 with the lowest number of new HIV diagnoses in this population being reported in 2016.
- Between 2015 and 2016, newly diagnosed HIV infections among people who inject drugs accounted for only 5% of the total number of diagnoses in those years. In 2018, this number increased to 17%.
- From 2016 to 2018, the number of newly diagnosed HIV infections (regardless of AIDS status) among people who inject drugs rose from 33 to 71 cases, representing a 115% increase in diagnoses among this population.
- 86% of cases were HIV, non-AIDS at the time of diagnosis, representing a high proportion of more recently acquired infection.

The demographics of people who inject drugs with newly diagnosed HIV infection is unchanged



- 65% of the new HIV diagnoses among people who inject drugs were male.
- 55% of the new HIV diagnoses among people who inject drugs identified as non-Hispanic White, 21% Hispanic, and 21% non-Hispanic Black.
- The majority of cases (44%) were between the ages of 30-39, however the percentage of people aged 25-29 increased from last report (11% to 22%).
- 63% of the new HIV diagnoses among people who inject drugs were coinfecting with hepatitis C. Coinfection with hepatitis B and triple infection (HIV, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C) was 14%.

The increase in new cases is likely an effect of the opioid crisis

- Previous reductions in HIV infections from injection drug use in Philadelphia were likely due to several protective factors, including: access to sterile syringes through Prevention Point Philadelphia, access to drug treatment, and behavioral changes among experienced users.
- Philadelphia's opioid crisis is characterized by the introduction of illicit fentanyl, a rise in the number of people who inject drugs, an increase in homelessness among drug users, an increase in hepatitis C transmission, and sharp increases in fatal and non-fatal drug overdoses.
- Fentanyl has a shorter duration of effect than heroin, thus people who inject fentanyl are injecting more frequently, increasing their likelihood of reusing and sharing used syringes.
- This increase presents a renewed risk for HIV infection among people who inject drugs and their partners.

What can be done

The Health Department is:

- Contacting sex and needle-sharing partners of persons with HIV infection anonymously to offer HIV testing and ensure that persons in need of HIV care are linked to treatment.
- Mobilizing “One-Stop Shops” to provide comprehensive healthcare services for people living with and/or at risk for HIV and hepatitis C infection.
- Continuing the expansion of community-based HIV testing in key areas to identify undiagnosed HIV infection and rapidly link persons to treatment.
- Linking persons at high-risk of HIV infection to pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), a once-a-day pill that prevents HIV infection.
- Expanding programs that provide sterile syringes to persons who inject drugs.

Health care providers should:

- Offer testing to high-risk persons. The Health Department recommends HIV and hepatitis C testing and repeat testing every three months for all persons at high risk for HIV infection, including persons who may use or inject drugs, people who are experiencing homelessness, and people who engage in transactional sex.
- Provide referrals to effective harm reduction services, like Prevention Point Philadelphia. Sterile syringes and drug use equipment save lives and prevent new HIV and hepatitis C infections.
- Provide risk-reduction counseling for all patients, which includes discussions about sexual behaviors and drug use.
- Report all new cases of HIV infection in people who inject drugs to the Health Department promptly by phone to 215-685-4789 with as much risk history, clinical, and demographic data as you can obtain.
- Assist in HIV partner notification and linkage to HIV medical care, support services, and insurance. Partner Services can be reached at 215-685-6612.

People can:

- Get tested for HIV if you have ever injected drugs or have a partner who injects drugs.
 - If HIV positive, promptly begin treatment with antiretroviral therapy.
 - If HIV negative and injecting drugs or have a partner who is injecting drugs, talk with your doctor to learn about PrEP, which is a daily pill to prevent HIV.
 - Encourage friends and family who may be at risk for HIV and/or hepatitis C through drug use to be tested and retested for HIV and hepatitis C.
 - Begin drug treatment if you are dependent on opioids or other drugs. Call 888-545-2600 for help finding a treatment program. If you continue to use drugs, use clean needles and injection equipment each time; do not share needles or injection equipment.
 - Use condoms regularly to prevent HIV and/or hepatitis C transmission through sexual activity.
 - Remain engaged in HIV treatment, if you are living with HIV. Everyone with HIV in Philadelphia can get the care and medication they need to treat HIV and live a long and healthy life, even if they can't pay or don't have insurance.
 - Seek hepatitis C treatment, if you are living with hep C. With new medications, hepatitis C is curable in most people in 8-12 weeks with no or minimal side effects.
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Resources

- Drug treatment referrals and education: 888-545-2600; <http://dbhids.org/addiction-services/>
- List of health care providers that provide PrEP: <https://go.usa.gov/xngJp>
- HIV testing sites in Philadelphia: <https://www.phila.gov/health/aaco/AACOTesting.html>
- PDPH AIDS Activities Coordinating Office Health Information Line: 215-985-2437
- Harm reduction resources and education, including syringe exchange and infectious disease screening: Prevention Point of Philadelphia – 215-634-5272; www.ppponline.org

Footnote: Data from the last CHART “HIV Spread Among People who Inject Drugs. CHART 2018; 3(4):1-4” may differ from this report as this report includes the total number of new HIV infections (regardless of AIDS status) among people who inject drugs.

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