

SEXUAL HEALTH - HIV Fact Sheet

Background

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a virus that attacks the immune system. Most HIV transmission in the UK occurs through sexual contact (both between people of the same and opposite sex). The two groups at highest risk of HIV infection are men who have sex with men (MSM), and the Black African heterosexual population. The number of infections acquired through other routes of transmission (i.e. injecting drug use, nosocomial infection and mother-to-child-transmission) remains relatively small. HIV can be treated with medication that allows people with the infection to have a near-typical life expectancy.¹ Untreated, HIV can progress to AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) within 8-10 years.

HIV affects all population groups. The overall prevalence of infection in the UK is 2.8 per 1,000 population aged 15-59 years (1.9 per 1,000 women and 3.7 per 1,000 men).² Within the general population there are particular groups who experience higher rates of infection. In the UK the population group with the highest rate of people living with the infection are men who have sex with men (MSM) (59 per 1,000 aged 15-59 years),³ followed by Black African people (56 per 1,000 aged 15-59 years overall; 41 per 1,000 in men; 71 per 1,000 in women).⁴

It has been estimated that over half of all HIV transmission occurs from people who are unaware that they have the disease. It is thought that approximately 1 in 4 people living with HIV in the UK are unaware of their diagnosis.⁵

The earlier that people have their HIV infection diagnosed, the earlier they can access effective treatment which can improve their health and reduce their risk of infecting others. People who have their HIV diagnosed at a late stage of disease (defined as a CD4 count <350 cells/mm³) have a ten-fold higher risk of mortality within one year of diagnosis and increased health care costs compared to those diagnosed promptly.⁶

The Public Health response to HIV aims to reduce the transmission of infection and increase the proportion of people who are diagnosed at an early stage of infection. The majority of new cases of HIV occur through sexual intercourse and can be prevented by the effective use of condoms. Early diagnosis can be improved by making HIV testing widely available and acceptable. The Department of Health recommends that HIV testing should be offered to everyone who registers with a GP or is admitted to a general medical ward in a borough where the overall prevalence of HIV is greater than 2 cases per 1,000 adults.

¹ PHE (2014) Addressing Late HIV Diagnosis through Screening and Testing: An Evidence Summary

² PHE (2014) HIV in the United Kingdom report

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/401662/2014_PHE_HI_V_annual_report_draft_Final_07-01-2015.pdf

³ PHE (2014) HIV in the United Kingdom report

⁴ PHE (2014) HIV in the United Kingdom report

⁵ PHE (2014) HIV in the United Kingdom report

⁶ PHE (2013) HIV Epidemiology in London: 2011 data

Relevant indicators in the Public Health Outcomes Framework

- *3.04 HIV Late Diagnosis:* The proportion of people presenting with HIV at a late stage of infection (used as an indirect performance measure for HIV prevention)
- *4.03 Mortality Rate from Causes Considered Preventable:* The age-standardised rate of mortality from causes considered preventable per 100,000 population, including from HIV/AIDS

The Local Picture

HIV in London is a major public health issue. In 2015, there were over 2,600 new diagnoses of HIV in London⁷ and it is estimated that 12% of Londoners with HIV are unaware of their HIV status.⁸

In 2015, there were almost 300 residents in Sutton aged 15-59 years known to be infected with HIV.⁹ This equates to a prevalence rate of 2.4 per 1,000 population aged 15-59 years. This is a similar prevalence to the UK (2.3 per 1,000).

In 2013-15, Sutton was the third poorest performing local authority in London for the indicator of the proportion of people presenting with late stage infection. Just under half (47.9%) of Sutton residents that were diagnosed with HIV were diagnosed late.¹⁰ This is significantly higher than London (33.5%) and England (40.3%).

Within Sutton, a range of HIV prevention and support services are offered alongside other boroughs in South West London as well as London as a whole. This allows for a seamless and individualised system of services across geographical boundaries. Free HIV testing is offered to all ages through the Integrated Sexual Health Service which provides joint Genito-Urinary Medicine (GUM) and Contraceptive and Sexual Health (CaSH) services collaboratively at three locations across the borough. Sutton also participates in the Public Health England HIV home sampling programme, enabling residents to request a kit online and undertake a test for HIV at home.

Links to further information

- Public Health England. Sexual and Reproductive Health Profiles.
<http://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/sexualhealth>

⁷ PHE (2016) HIV: Annual data tables: 2015 data

⁸ PHE (2015) Annual Epidemiological Spotlight on HIV in London: 2014 data

⁹ PHE (2014) HIV in the United Kingdom report

¹⁰ PHE, Sexual Health Profiles. <http://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/sexualhealth/data>