

# HIV/AIDS RELATED KNOWLEDGE

## FINDINGS FROM THE 2012 HIV/AIDS ATTITUDINAL TRACKING SURVEY

The 2012 HIV/AIDS Attitudinal Tracking Survey involved 2,000 randomly selected respondents from Canada, 16 years and older, who were interviewed by telephone to measure awareness, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours related to HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C (HCV). This fact sheet explores key findings related to knowledge and awareness of HIV infection.

### HIV/AIDS KNOWLEDGE HAS DECLINED OVER THE LAST 9 YEARS

- Most Canadians know that when a person has an HIV infection, their body has difficulty defending itself against common infections (75%); however, this knowledge has declined since 2006 (81%).

### KNOWLEDGE ABOUT HIV TRANSMISSION

- A decreasing number of Canadians are able to identify the main ways that HIV is transmitted. The most common responses, without prompting, included:
  - Sex between a man and woman (63% vs. 76% in 2006)
  - Sex between a man and a man (52%, vs. 67% in 2006)
  - Blood to blood contact (55% vs. 54% in 2006)
  - Sharing drug needles (31% vs. 35% in 2006)
  - Unsafe/unprotected oral sex (20% vs. 18% in 2006)
  - Bodily fluids transfer (11% vs. 8% in 2006)
  - Mother-to-child transmission (3% vs. 4% in 2006)

### FACTS ABOUT HIV TRANSMISSION

- HIV is a virus that attacks the immune system, resulting in chronic, progressive illness that can leave people vulnerable to infections.
- For infection to occur, HIV contained in the blood, semen, pre-ejaculate (pre-semen), vaginal fluids, or breast milk of an infected person must enter the body.
- The following activities with a person living with HIV infection are considered high-risk for HIV transmission to occur:
  - engaging in unprotected anal or vaginal intercourse
  - sharing sex toys that are used internally
  - sharing needles or equipment for injecting drugs or steroids
  - mother-to-child transmission during pregnancy, delivery, and breastfeeding
- HIV **cannot** be transmitted in the following ways:
  - shaking hands or hugging
  - coughing or sneezing
  - using swimming pools or toilet seats
  - sharing eating utensils or using water fountains
  - mosquito and other insect bites
  - animal bites



## KNOWLEDGE ABOUT HIV TESTING AND WHO IS AT RISK

- Almost all Canadians understand that a blood test is required to diagnose an HIV infection (93% vs. 96% in 2006). Only 37% of respondents reported ever being tested (32% in 2006).
- The groups most commonly identified by Canadians as being most affected by HIV/AIDS are:
  - Gay men (51% vs. 49% in 2006)
  - Injection drug users (22% vs. 29% in 2006)
  - Aboriginal people (7% vs. 4% in 2006)
  - Canadian youth (5% vs. 9% in 2006)

## SELF-RATED KNOWLEDGE

- When asked to self-rate their knowledge related to HIV/AIDS:
  - Most Canadians still believe that they are moderately knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS (67% vs. 65% in 2006).
  - Fewer Canadians rate themselves as highly knowledgeable (22% vs. 30% in 2006).
  - More Canadians rate themselves as not knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS (11% vs. 5% in 2006).

## HIV/AIDS IN CANADA

- It is estimated that approximately 71,300 people were living with HIV infection in Canada at the end of 2011. Of these, an estimated 25% (17,980) are undiagnosed and unaware of their infection.
- In 2011, estimated new HIV infections in Canada were distributed among the following categories:
  - 46.6% men who have sex with men
  - 37.2% heterosexual contact
  - 13.7% injection drug use
- At the end of 2011, women living with HIV accounted for approximately 23.3% of the national total.
- Aboriginal peoples account for approximately 8.9% of all people living with HIV in Canada at the end of 2011, and for 12.2% of all new infections in 2011.
- While there is no cure for HIV/AIDS, effective treatments exist that can prolong and improve the quality of life for individuals living with HIV/AIDS.

If you have questions related to the report, please contact: [ccdic-clmti@phac-aspc.gc.ca](mailto:ccdic-clmti@phac-aspc.gc.ca)

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