

STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

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. This fact sheet explores key findings related to stigma around HIV infection and discrimination towards people living with HIV/AIDS and compares them with what we know about HIV risk and transmission in Canada.

GENERAL LEVEL OF STIGMA TOWARD PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS REMAINS LOW

Stigma towards people living with HIV/AIDS has remained relatively low but stable over time.

- 15% of Canadians “feel afraid of people living with HIV/AIDS” (compared to 13% in 2006).
- 9% of Canadians “could not be friends with someone who had HIV/AIDS” (compared to 12% in 2006).
- 9% of Canadians agree that “people who get HIV/AIDS through sex or drug use got what they deserve” (compared to 10% in 2006).

PERCEIVED REPERCUSSIONS OF STIGMA ASSOCIATED WITH HIV/AIDS

- While 79% agreed that it is the responsibility of people living with HIV/AIDS to tell others of their infection, 94% of Canadians believe to a moderate or large extent that people are unwilling to tell others because of the stigma associated with the disease.
- 38% of people believe to a large extent that people are unwilling to get tested for HIV because of the stigma associated with the disease.

FACTS ABOUT HIV

- HIV is a virus that attacks the immune system, resulting in chronic, progressive illness that can leave people vulnerable to infections.
- HIV is a frail virus that does not survive long outside the human body; aside from some very specific behaviours, HIV does not transmit easily from one person to another.
- It is estimated that approximately 71,300 people were living with HIV infection in Canada at the end of 2011. 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
- Stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS may reinforce any existing social inequalities and can lead to exclusion, withdrawal, social isolation and feelings of low self-worth, depression or other mental health consequences.
- Experiences and/or fear of stigma and discrimination may negatively impact HIV prevention by leading to secrecy and HIV non-disclosure, which can lead to increased transmission, or delayed diagnosis and treatment.
- Other factors contribute to stigma and discrimination toward people at risk or living with HIV/AIDS including homophobia, racism and attitudes toward drug use.



LEVEL OF DISCOMFORT REMAINS HIGH

Despite indicating little stigma towards people living with HIV/AIDS, when asked about their level of comfort with certain situations.

- 51% of Canadians indicated a level of discomfort associated with a close friend or family member dating a person living with HIV/AIDS.
- 49% of Canadians indicated discomfort using a restaurant drinking glass once used by a person living with HIV/AIDS and 24% indicated discomfort wearing a sweater once worn by a person living with HIV/AIDS.

Many Canadians indicated the source of their discomfort as being associated with fear of their child coming into contact with the infection or contracting HIV themselves.

- 34% indicate that they would be uncomfortable with a person living with HIV/AIDS going to school with their child because of the potential for an accident where their child comes into contact that individual's blood.
- 32% cite fear of contracting HIV themselves as a reason for their discomfort working with a person living with HIV/AIDS.
- 38% indicate discomfort with touching products a person living with HIV/AIDS had touched if they were to shop at a store owned by a person living with HIV/AIDS.

FACTS ABOUT HIV RISK AND TRANSMISSION

- 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 who is living with HIV infection are considered high-risk for HIV transmission to occur:
 - engaging in unprotected vaginal or anal 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
 - touching the same products
 - sharing clothing

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

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