

## Higher HIV Infection Rates Seen in Mental Health Patients: Study

People seeking psych help had 16 times the rate of AIDS virus infection than general U.S. population

Robert Preidt, *U.S. National Library of Medicine*  
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[http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory\\_144599.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_144599.html)

(HealthDay News) -- Americans seeking treatment for mental health disorders may be four to 16 times more likely to be infected with HIV than those in the general population, a new study reveals.

The findings emphasize the need to provide testing for HIV -- the virus that causes AIDS -- in mental health care facilities, the researchers said.

The study authors provided HIV testing to more than 1,000 people in Philadelphia and Baltimore who sought treatment for mental health problems such as depression, psychosis and substance abuse from January 2009 to August 2011.

About 4.8 percent of these patients were infected with HIV. That's 16 times higher than the rate of 0.3 percent in the overall U.S. population, and about four times higher than the rates of 1.4 percent in Philadelphia and 1.3 percent in Baltimore. Both cities are HIV epicenters, the researchers noted.

Thirteen of the 51 mental health patients found to have HIV did not know they were infected, according to the study published Feb. 13 in the *American Journal of Public Health*.

The findings showed that HIV infection was more common among people with more severe symptoms of mental illness and among groups of people most likely to be infected in the general population, including blacks, gay or bisexual men, and those with hepatitis C, which often indicates past injection drug use.

"These findings paint a recent picture of HIV infection rates in the community, and reinforce how important it is to identify patients and get them into appropriate infectious disease care in a timely manner while being treated for mental illness," study lead author Michael Blank, an associate professor in psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania, said in a university news release.

"With such a high-risk group, it's imperative to be routinely testing patients to improve care and reduce transmissions to others. Historically, though, HIV testing is often not implemented in mental health care," Blank added.

The Institute of Medicine and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend routine HIV testing for patients in all health care settings, including those being treated for mental health problems.

*SOURCE: University of Pennsylvania, news release, Feb. 13, 2014*