HIV in Specific Populations

HIV and African Americans

How common is HIV among African Americans?
From coast to coast, HIV has disproportionately affected African-American communities. Though blacks make up only 12 percent of the U.S. population, they account for 44 percent of all new HIV infections among adults and adolescents in 2016. African Americans comprise 61 percent of all HIV/AIDS cases among women.

Does HIV affect African Americans differently?
Advances in antiretroviral (ARV) therapy have benefited all HIV-positive people with access to treatment. While AIDS deaths have declined overall, the decrease has been more dramatic among whites than among people of color. Though it’s unlikely that HIV progresses faster or that HIV treatment is less effective in African Americans, it is possible that they receive less adequate health care than whites.

African-American people are also at a higher risk for other health problems, which can make managing HIV infection more difficult. These include:

- High blood pressure and heart disease. Both conditions, which can lead to heart attacks and heart failure, are nearly 40 percent more common in blacks than whites. Because ARVs, and HIV itself, can further increase the risk of cardiovascular disease, monitoring heart health is an important part of medical care for HIV-positive African-American men and women.

- Diabetes. Compared with whites, blacks are almost twice as likely to develop this disease, where the body is unable to properly control the amount of sugar in the blood. Left untreated, diabetes can cause damage to the kidneys, eyes, heart and nerves. ARVs can increase the risk of blood sugar problems, so HIV-positive African Americans may want to address the diabetes risk factors they can control: by exercising, eating healthy, keeping their weight down and having regular lab tests.

- Kidney disease. Blacks are nearly four times more likely to develop kidney disease compared with whites. Eighty-five percent of cases of HIV-related kidney damage, nephropathy, involve
African Americans.

- Hepatitis C. Compared with whites, blacks are twice as likely to suffer from this life-threatening form of liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV). Hep C is harder to treat in HIV-positive people and can increase the risk of ARV liver side effects.

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