

## **Sexual behaviors and sexual identities that put young lesbians at risk for HIV and STD's**

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Objective: Young lesbian and bisexual women may be at greater risk for HIV and other STDs than older lesbian and bisexual women due to sexual experimentation with both men and women (Hunter et al., 1993) and the higher rates of partner change seen among young adults (CDC, 1992). Behavior changes in response to HIV and other STDs are not well documented among this population.

Method: We examined prevalence of sexual behaviors in a two ethnically diverse (African American, Asian American, Latina and White) samples of lesbian and bisexual women, aged 18 to 25 years, recruited in 1993 (N = 181) and 1995 (N = 271) from gay pride festivals in Los Angeles County. Women completed brief surveys assessing both homosexual and heterosexual sexual behavior in the prior year and self-reports of recent sexually transmitted diseases.

Results: Prevalence of sexual behaviors over the two year period were stable. Reports of prevalent HIV infection were rare (0.5%); approximately 7% reported another STD in the prior year. Although few women indicated using protective barriers during sex with other women, rates of partner change were not high, with women reporting 1.0 median number of female sex partners in the prior year. Nevertheless, 26% of women report having had sex with men in the prior year and of these 19% reported sex with a gay man in the prior 3 months. Two thirds of women who had sex with a gay man were teenagers and all self-identified as bisexual or something other than lesbian.

Conclusions: Findings underscore the need to target HIV prevention services to both bisexual women and teenage women among the population of women who have sex with women.

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