

AIDS in Riverside County: Racial/Ethnic Differences in Reporting Source and Disease Progression

Key Findings

- AIDS case reports for persons of color are more likely to be made by a hospital rather than a private physician's office. The reverse is true for white residents in Riverside County.
- Hispanic and black residents diagnosed with HIV in Riverside County progress to AIDS faster compared to white residents.

Introduction

The majority of AIDS cases living in Riverside County are white men who have sex with men (MSM). Black and Hispanic prevalence rates have remained relatively low.

This data brief examines whether there are racial/ethnic differences in AIDS case reporting in Riverside County. Further, potential racial/ethnic differences in progression to AIDS diagnosis among people infected with HIV are investigated.

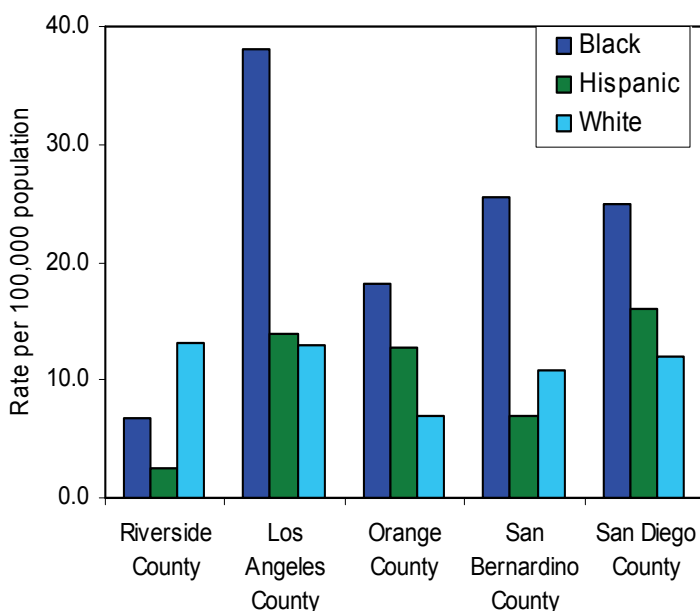
Background

As of December 2006, 5,233 AIDS cases and since California instituted mandatory HIV reporting in 2002 1,843 HIV-positive individuals had been reported to Riverside County Department of Public Health. Currently, there are 4,738 persons reported as living with HIV/AIDS in Riverside County.

The majority of those diagnosed and reported with HIV or AIDS in Riverside County are white (72.3%). A lower proportion of reported HIV or AIDS cases are Hispanic (17.5%) and black (8.5%). However, in the counties surrounding Riverside County, blacks and Hispanics account for a greater proportion of reported HIV/AIDS cases.

Exhibit 1

AIDS Incidence Rates by Race/Ethnicity for Riverside County and Surrounding Counties, 2006



Racial/Ethnic Differences in AIDS Incidence

Across Southern California counties, black populations have the highest incidence of AIDS compared to Hispanic and white populations.

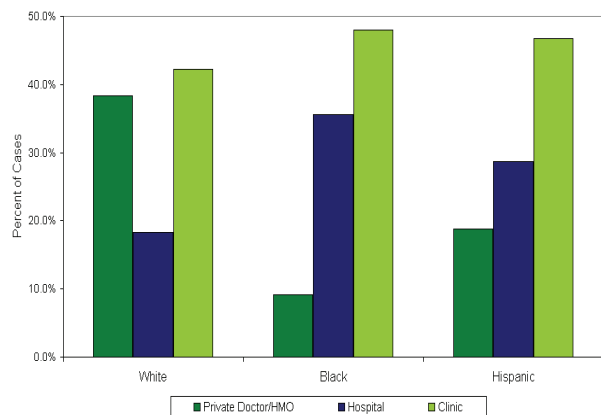
In a recent study of national data published in the American Journal of Public Health (Hall, et al. AJPH, 2007; 97:1060-1066), HIV diagnosis rates were found to be higher among blacks and Hispanics as compared to whites. This phenomenon is mirrored by Southern California counties except Riverside County.

Reporting source: Are there differences?

When examining reporting source among all AIDS cases reported in Riverside County, there is a difference related to whether an AIDS diagnosis was reported by a private physician or by a hospital. (Exhibit 2) A greater percentage of black and Hispanic AIDS case reports were received from hospital sources (inpatient or emergency room records) as compared to white AIDS case reports. People of color in Riverside County were 4 times more likely to be reported as having AIDS by a hospital rather than by a private physician ($p < 0.001$).

Exhibit 2

AIDS Case Reporting Sources by Race/Ethnicity
Riverside County, 2000 - 2006



...Continued from front. Further investigation needs to be conducted to determine the reasons for the observed differences because the available data does not readily explain it. One hypothesis is healthcare utilization patterns differ by race/ethnicity in Riverside County. Another is persons of color may delay care or access care at a later stage compared to others in Riverside County.

However, these findings suggest similarities to those of a recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study in five metropolitan United States cities which found that the majority of unrecognized HIV infections were non-Hispanic black or Hispanic MSM (MMWR 2005; 54:597-601). The authors suggest testing efforts be focused on these populations.

Are there racial/ethnic differences in progression to AIDS in Riverside County?

Data on progression to AIDS from first positive HIV test result among racial/ethnic groups were examined to determine whether there truly were no differences in progression time, given differences seen in AIDS incidence among racial/ethnic groups in Riverside County.

Differences in the time it takes for persons of different racial/ethnic groups to develop AIDS after HIV diagnosis was analyzed as depicted in Exhibit 3. Of the cumulative cases reported since 1983, data on length of time between first positive HIV test result and date of AIDS diagnosis report was available for 1375 individuals.

We compared the time to event for each racial/ethnic group. An event was defined as progressing to AIDS diagnosis. At the start of the time period, the event rate was zero because cases were HIV+ without an AIDS diagnosis. The cumulative probability of remaining free of an AIDS diagnosis decreases over time. Results demonstrated significantly shorter progression time for black and Hispanic persons infected with HIV as compared to whites with HIV.

Progression from first positive HIV result to AIDS diagnosis

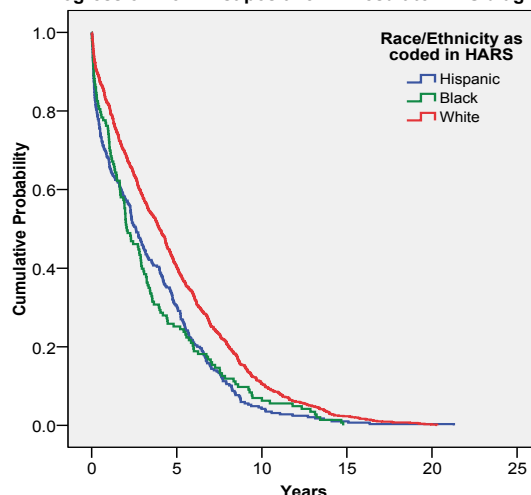


Exhibit 3

While the median progression time to AIDS for white persons was 3.9 years, the median progression time for blacks (median=2.1 years) and Hispanics (median=2.6 years) was significantly shorter. In Riverside County, while the majority of reported AIDS cases are white, blacks and Hispanics progress more quickly to AIDS.

Future directions

Findings in this brief suggest the need for closer examination of Riverside County HIV testing data to identify whether communities of color are being tested and diagnosed at lower than expected rates based on risk factors and population size as compared to surrounding Southern California counties. Further examination of HIV testing data may yield information to assist in the creation of targeted outreach programs.

Suggested Citation

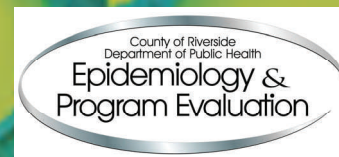
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