

FACT SHEET 3: NATIONAL HIV PREVALENCE AND BEHAVIOUR AMONG CHILDREN

HIV PREVALENCE LOWER IN YOUNGER CHILDREN

The overall HIV prevalence among children aged 18 years and younger was 2.9%. The age-specific HIV prevalence levels are set out in Table 1. The majority of children aged 0-4 who are living with HIV acquire HIV through their mothers and 3.3% of children in this age group are HIV positive. HIV prevalence among 15-18 year olds reflects HIV transmission through sex.

When these figures were further analysed, it was found that the prevalence among the youngest children of 0-2 years of age was 2.1%, which is lower than the 3.3% in the age group 0-4 as a whole. This pattern could indicate a possible positive impact of the national prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) programme in the two years before the study took place. During that period coverage of antiretroviral treatment increased to reach almost three-quarters of HIV positive pregnant and lactating women.

Table 1: HIV prevalence among children by age groups, South Africa 2008

Age	N	HIV (%)
0-4	1552	3.3
5 - 11	1708	2.5
12-14	964	1.1
15-18	1 551	4.5
Total 0-18	5 745	2.9

The prevalence of HIV varied by province with the lowest prevalence found in Western Cape at less than 1%, while low to intermediate HIV prevalence was found in the Northern Cape, Eastern Cape, North West Province and Limpopo, where prevalence was less than 3%. Provinces with higher HIV prevalence were Gauteng (3.1%) and Free State (3.1%), KwaZulu-Natal (3.4%) and Mpumalanga (4.5%).

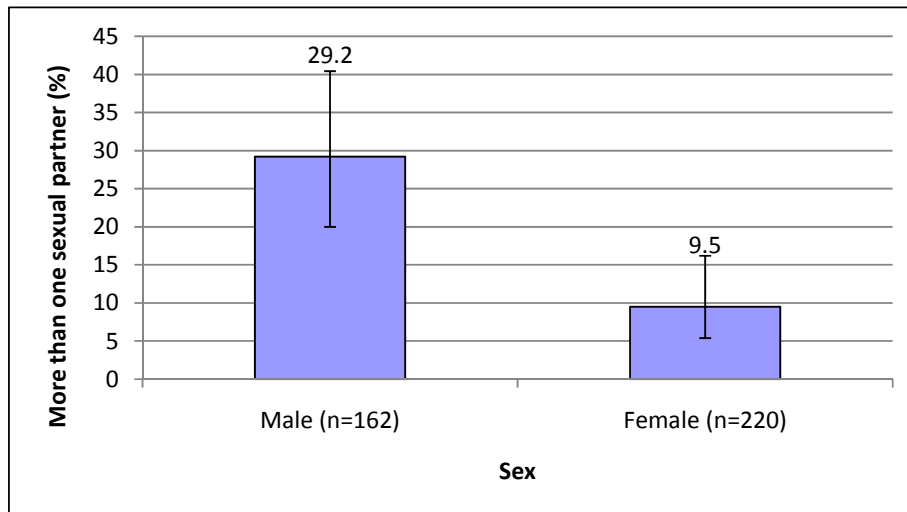
Sexual behaviour

Among children aged 12-14 years, 10.8% of males and 14.5% of females reported having had sex in the past year. Among males and females aged 12-18 years, males mostly had sex with partners in the same age-range, while more than a quarter of females in this same age group (26.4%) had had sex with males who were five years or more older than themselves. Having older partners significantly increases the risk of acquiring HIV.

Multiple sexual partnerships

Having multiple sexual partners increases the risk for acquiring HIV. In the 15-18 year age group, more males (29.2%) reported having had more than two sexual partners in the past 12 months than did females (9.5%).

Figure 1: Proportion of males and females reporting more than one sexual partner in the past 12 months in the 12-18 year age group, South Africa 2008



RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Department of Health's Prevention of Mother-to-Child (PMTCT) programme should emphasise ensuring access of HIV-positive pregnant mothers to antiretroviral therapy to further reduce new infections and move towards the elimination of HIV/AIDS in young children. The new policy now accommodates this.
- The Department of Health should revise the national guidelines to include early initiation of ART in infants as soon as infection is confirmed as well as establishing adolescent-focused services in treatment centres to respond to the needs of children and youth who are HIV positive. Again the policy has been recently announced and is now being implemented.
- The Department of Health should ensure that HIV infection patterns among children are regularly monitored to continually inform policies and comprehensive HIV prevention, care and treatment services in children.
- It is recommended that HIV health education activities in schools and out-of-schools continue to promote sexual abstinence among children aged 12-18 years as a primary prevention approach.

Note: South African National HIV Prevalence, Incidence, Behaviour and Communication Survey, 2008: The health of our children by Shisana et al. was part of a large national population-based household survey conducted by a research consortium led by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). The survey included 8 966 children aged 0-18 years. The full report is available on www.hsrbpress.co.za.