

HIV / AIDS & INUIT



Here Are the Facts!

HIV/AIDS continue to grow and threaten Aboriginal peoples throughout the world. Over the last decade there has been a steady rise in Aboriginal AIDS cases in Canada. Studies have shown that as many as twenty percent of the almost 17,000 AIDS cases in Canada are among Aboriginal people.

The majority of the 45,000 Inuit live in the 53 remote communities of Arctic Canada. Both Ottawa and Montreal have substantial, organized Inuit communities. Most often Inuit are statically included within larger Aboriginal statistics. Inuit-specific HIV/AIDS statistics are scarce.

Inuit-specific projects and programs have been slowly implemented over the past several years but Inuit awareness of HIV and AIDS issues remains below other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations. The lack of strong prevention activities has created a situation in which Inuit are at an ever increasing risk of becoming infected with HIV. Many Inuit in Arctic communities still think that their isolation from southern Canada will protect them and their families, while others believe that sharing needles to do drugs is the only behavior putting Aboriginal people at risk for HIV/AIDS. Therefore, if they do not share needles to do drugs then they are not at risk.

The fact is that unprotected heterosexual sex remains the number one way Inuit become infected with HIV.

Why is HIV/AIDS a threat to Inuit?

No one is immune from HIV or AIDS, however, studies have shown that HIV infection rates are higher among populations, like many Inuit communities, where poverty, family violence and drug/alcohol abuse are present. The indicators of unprotected sexual activity - a very high sexually transmitted disease rate and a high teen pregnancy rate - prove that Inuit are at risk of HIV infection.

Access to HIV/AIDS prevention information in Inuktitut remains limited at best, which makes it even more difficult for many Inuit to truly understand their own risk of HIV.

Although most health centers offer HIV testing, many Inuit are afraid to be tested in their home community out of a fear that other community members will find out. Some Inuit choose not to be tested because they realize they may have to go south for treatment. The fact is few Inuit communities are prepared to care for an Inuk with HIV/AIDS and the health care system is generally not well prepared either.



