

## 75 percent of U.S. HIV patients lack effective care

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Only a quarter of Americans infected with the AIDS virus are getting effective treatment, according to a U.S. government report released Friday -- and the youngest patients are the worst off. The numbers could worsen if states don't broaden health care as called for under the 2010 health reform law, scientists worry.

It's the first comprehensive look by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at who is getting effective care, and it doesn't paint a promising picture. The findings raise even more alarm bells as study after study presented at the International AIDS Conference in Washington this week show that treatment can help stop the spread of HIV.

"The majority of people living with HIV in the United States are not on antiretroviral treatment, not in stable care," Dr. Kenneth Mayer of The Fenway Institute and Harvard Medical School in Boston told a news conference. "They need to be in care first and then able to get treatment."

The study finds that just over a third of HIV patients have steady care -- 34 percent of African-Americans, 37 percent of Latinos and 38 percent of whites.

Younger patients are the least likely to be getting the cocktails of drugs that can keep them healthy and help keep them from infecting others. Just 15 percent of those aged 25-34 had the virus suppressed to desired levels, compared to 36 percent of those aged 55-64. Only 22 percent of young adults were even getting HIV drugs to treat their infection, the CDC found.

There's no cure for the human immunodeficiency virus that causes AIDS and no vaccine. HIV has killed 25 million since it first started spreading globally in the early 1980s, and more than 33 million people are infected worldwide. About 1.1 million people in the United States have HIV, and the CDC estimates that 20 percent of them don't even know it.

"We have to continue to raise the alarm," CDC's top AIDS official, Dr. Kevin Fenton, said in an interview. "We have to find that sense of outrage."

The same factors are driving high transmission and poor treatment rates among some U.S. groups: poverty, a lack of access to medical care, and a lack of education about what causes HIV and what people can do about it. Policymakers need to understand that treating people with HIV saves money, Fenton said.

"What we now know is that treating HIV is cost-effective. For every dollar spent, you save \$2," Fenton said.

Fenton said the U.S. should pull out the stops on providing condoms, counseling, testing and treatment.

“We need to ensure that states have policies that support routine HIV testing,” Fenton said. “Clearly, this is going to be more challenging in some states than in others.”

Top AIDS experts in the U.S. say no matter what people may think about the moral implications of some of the behavior that leads to HIV infection, it will benefit everyone to get people tested, treated and counseled about controlling their infection.

“Every state really must enact the Affordable Care Act,” said Dr. Judith Aberg, president of the HIV Medicine Association and an AIDS expert at New York University. “States need to fund HIV treatment and prevention. We need to continue this fight.”

Governors of several states have said they will not expand Medicaid, required by the health care law, because they cannot afford it. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled last month that states can decide whether to abide by that provision. States refusing expansion now include Texas, Florida, South Carolina and Louisiana. Medicaid, the state-federal health insurance plan for the poor, currently does not cover most low-income adults with HIV. AIDS activists say it’s essential to controlling the epidemic to get coverage for young adults with HIV, and at risk for HIV.