Acute Hep C Infection is Linked With Sexual Behavior Among HIV-Positive Gay Men

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HIV-positive men who have sex with men (MSM) are more likely to be acutely (very recently) infected with hepatitis C virus (HCV) if they have casual sex partners. Researchers analyzed data on 175 HIV/HCV-coinfected individuals in the Control and Elimination of HCV from HIV-infected individuals within Australia (CEASE-D) cohort study, including those enrolled between July 2014 and August 2015. Results were presented at the 2016 Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI) in Boston.

Eighty-nine percent of the cohort were MSM. The median time since contracting hep C was seven years among the MSM and 16 years among the others; a respective 25 percent and zero recently acquired the virus.

Fifty-three percent of the cohort contracted hep C through injection drug use and 33 percent did so through sexual transmission with a partner of the same sex.

A respective eighty-three percent and 73 percent of the cohort correctly identified drug needle sharing and sharing of other drug paraphernalia as high-risk behaviors where hep C acquisition is concerned. A respective 51 percent, 46 percent and 52 percent correctly identified fisting, sex toy sharing and group sex as high-risk behaviors. Sixty-nine percent were aware that individuals can be reinfected with hep C after being cured of the virus.

Among the 155 MSM, 34 percent had a regular male sex partner, 65 percent of whom were also HIV positive, and 66 percent had casual male partners. Seventy-four percent reported condomless anal sex, and 35 percent reported group sex. Seventy-four percent said they always or sometimes disclosed their HIV status to sexual partners, and 41 percent said they disclosed their HCV status to partners.

Being acutely infected with hep C was associated with younger age. Those who were employed part-time were three times more likely to be acutely infected than those with full-time employment. Those who contracted hep C through sex were 13.6 times more likely to be acutely infected than those infected through other means. Those with casual male partners were four times more likely to have acute infection than those who did not have such sexual partners.

To read the conference abstract and poster, click here.

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