In Australia, STIs Are Up, the HIV Rate Is Stable and Hep C Cures Abound

An annual surveillance report on STIs and other blood-borne illnesses also found that new cases of hepatitis B are down among youths.

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A new Australian surveillance report on sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and blood-borne viruses has found that gonorrhea and syphilis are on the rise, the HIV diagnosis rate remains stable and there is promising, if mixed, news on the hepatitis B and C virus (HBV/HCV) front.

The Kirby Institute at UNSW Sydney's Annual Surveillance Report on HIV, viral hepatitis and STIs indicated that during the past five years annual gonorrhea diagnoses in Australia have risen 63 percent. The increase has been particularly striking among young heterosexuals in major cities. Previously, the STI was uncommon among heterosexuals.

Since 2011, syphilis has made a comeback among young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who live in regional and remote areas of Northern Australia. Additionally, among Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, recent chlamydia and gonorrhea diagnosis rates were a respective threefold and sevenfold higher than among non-indigenous Australians; these disparities were even wider in the regional and remote areas.

New annual diagnoses of HIV have remained stable for the past five years, at about 1,000 per year. In 2016, 1,013 Australians were diagnosed with the virus; 86 percent of them are on antiretroviral treatment. The report's authors note that men who have sex with men (MSM) in particular have increased their rate of HIV testing.

The rate of new HIV diagnoses among Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, meanwhile, has increased by 39 percent since 2012. Compared with non-indigenous Australians, the new infections among this group are more likely to be a result of injection drug use and heterosexual sex.

Between March and December 2016, an estimated 30,434 Australians were cured of hep C.

During the past five years, the annual hep B diagnosis rate fell by 27 percent among Australians younger than 25, on account of the push to vaccinate infants and adolescents for this virus. (There is no vaccine for hep C.) An estimated 63 percent of the 230,000 Australians believed to have hep

B were diagnosed by the end of 2016. Of that group, just 27 percent were taking the proper tests to monitor their infection.

To read a press release about the report, click here.

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