

HIV incidence among First Nations people in Alberta

Age-standardized incidence rates of HIV by First Nations status, Alberta, 2012-2016

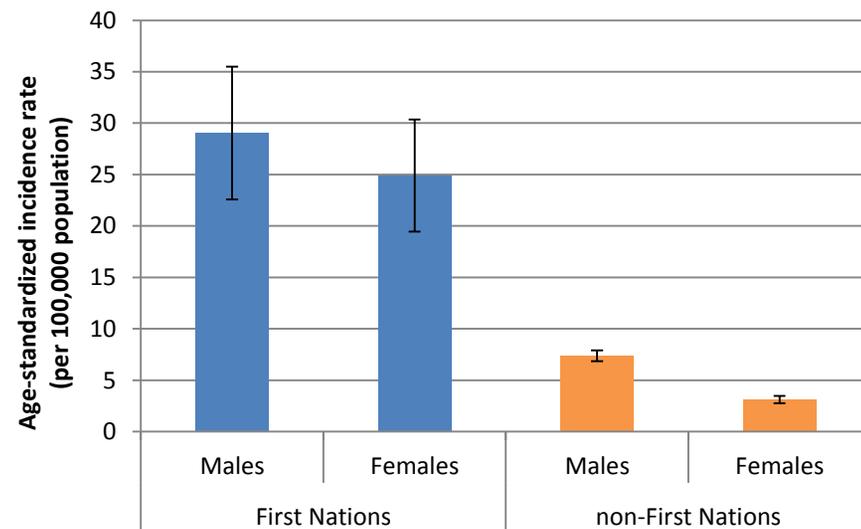
The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infects cells of the immune system.¹ Transmission can occur through the exchange of bodily fluids with infected individuals; risk of infection is increased with certain activities such as injection drug use and unprotected sex. Infection results in the progressive deterioration of the immune system, breaking down the body's ability to fend off infections and other diseases. Acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) refers to the most advanced stages of HIV infection. In today's *First Nations – Health Trends Alberta*,² we present age-standardized HIV incidence rates by sex for First Nations and non-First Nations from 2012 to 2016.

HIV incidence rates 4 times and 8 times higher among male and female First Nations, respectively, compared to their non-First Nations counterparts

In Alberta between 2012 and 2016, there was an annual average of around 260 new cases of HIV (40 among First Nations and 220 among non-First Nations). Among First Nations, the number of new cases was comparable between males and females (annual average of around 20 cases for both sexes); however, for non-First Nations, more cases were diagnosed among men (72 percent of total).

Average HIV rates over this time period were higher among First Nations compared to non-First Nations; however, the extent of this disparity differed by sex. Among men, HIV incidence rates were four times higher for First Nations compared to non-First Nations (29.0 versus 7.4 per 100,000 population, respectively). For First Nations women, however, HIV incidence rates were eight times higher compared to their non-First Nations counterparts (24.9 versus 3.1 per 100,000 population, respectively). There were no apparent changes in rates among First Nations and non-First Nations populations over this time period.

Testing for HIV is strongly recommended for anyone exposed to risk factors. HIV can be suppressed with the use of antiretroviral drug therapies to minimize the health impacts of infection but it cannot be cured. Ideally, the risk of exposure to the virus should be lessened through harm reduction strategies, such as the use of condoms, which aim to prevent infection.



¹ World Health Organization. HIV. (<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs360/en/>).

² This is the 24th in a series of First Nations-specific Health Trends compiled in collaboration by Alberta Health and the Alberta First Nations Information Governance Centre (AFNIGC). To suggest future topics, please contact the AFNIGC (communications@afnigc.ca; 403-539-5775).