

American Indians and Alaska Natives and HIV/AIDS

In 1981, a new infectious disease, AIDS (or acquired immunodeficiency syndrome), was identified in the US. Several years later, the causative agent of AIDS—human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)—was discovered. This discovery coincided with the growing recognition that AIDS in the US was part of a global infectious disease pandemic.

Currently, HIV/AIDS has been reported in virtually every racial and ethnic population, every age group, and every socioeconomic group in every state and most large cities in the US. HIV/AIDS remains a significant cause of illness, disability, and death in the US, despite declines in 1996 and 1997. (US DHHS, 2000). In 2001, an estimated 29,723 AIDS cases were diagnosed among minority racial or ethnic groups, which accounted for more than 70% of all AIDS cases diagnosed that year in the US. (CDC, 2002).

“American Indians and Alaska Natives represent a unique population within the US, not only because of their oppression suffered in the development of this country but also because of their ongoing struggle to gain recognition in the HIV/AIDS epidemic. American Indians and Alaska Natives are not so unique, however, that they are protected from the same behaviors that put all people at risk for HIV infection.” (Rowell and Bouey, 2002).

- **Prevalence and Incidence**
- **Traditional Health Beliefs and Practices**
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- **Diet**
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Prevalence and Incidence

- Through the end of 2000, **American Indians and Alaska Natives accounted for 2,337 AIDS cases and 871 HIV cases. American Indians and Alaska Natives constitute approximately 1% of the total US population, and just under 1% of reported AIDS and HIV cases.** Although these numbers appear small relative to other populations, the impact is considerable. (Rowell and Bouey, 2002).
- It is probable that **the number of AIDS and HIV cases among American Indians and Alaska Natives has been underreported** to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) due to misclassification of their ethnicity as white, Hispanic, or Asian. (Maldonado, 1999).
- In 1998, **American Indians and Alaska Natives had the fourth highest AIDS case rate per 100,000 among adults and adolescents (9.7)**—almost the same as the rate among whites (9.9). (Maldonado, 1999).
- **American Indian and Alaska Native males** have an AIDS case rate of 15.7 per 100,000, compared with a rate of 17.8 for white males. **American Indian and Alaska Native females** have an AIDS case rate of 3.8 per 100,000, compared with a rate of 2.4 for white females. (Maldonado, 1999).
- The AIDS case rate among **American Indian and Alaska Native children** younger than 13 years of age was 0.0. (Maldonado, 1999).
- The **rate of AIDS deaths** per 100,000 for American Indians and Alaska Natives was 1.3 times that of whites. (Maldonado, 1999).

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