

A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF SOUTH-EAST ASIAN-ACQUIRED HIV CASES AMONG HETEROSEXUAL MEN IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

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Background: From 2014 to 2018, the annual number of HIV notifications in WA decreased 48% to 57 cases, the lowest number reported in 15 years, largely reflecting a decline in men who have sex with men. This decline was not observed in heterosexual HIV cases, which remained relatively stable over the same period (n=157; average: 31.4 cases per year), of whom the majority of cases were male (67%; n=100). A descriptive epidemiological analysis was undertaken to further investigate this cohort of male heterosexual HIV cases.

Methods: Male heterosexual HIV notifications were extracted from the WA HIV Database for the 2014 to 2018 period. Data were analysed by age group, country of birth and acquisition, stage of diagnosis and, for cases who acquired HIV overseas, reason for overseas travel.

Results: From 2014 to 2018, 67% (n=67) of male heterosexual HIV cases reported overseas acquisition, of whom the majority acquired HIV in South-East Asia (n=47; 70%). Of the 47 South-East Asian-acquired cases, the majority were Australian-born (68%; n=32). Half the cases were aged 50 years or older (49%; n=23) and 21% were aged 40 to 49 years. Most of the cases reported acquiring HIV while on holiday (55%; n=26) and were late presenters (55%; n=26), as defined by a CD4 count < 350 cells/ μ L at diagnosis.

Conclusion: The recent decline in HIV cases in WA has not been observed among heterosexual males who acquired HIV overseas, particularly South-East Asia. These cases represent an older cohort who present with late stage infection. To complement the surveillance data, qualitative studies are needed to further understand risk behaviours and attitudes towards risk and HIV testing. Tailored interventions are required to reach emerging populations at risk of HIV exposure to prevent transmission and ensure early diagnosis.

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