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ABSTRACT

Recent trends in HIV diagnoses in New Zealand

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The AIDS Epidemiology Group has, since 1989, undertaken the surveillance of HIV in New Zealand.

Men who have sex with men (MSM) continue to be the most affected by HIV in New Zealand (NZ), accounting for 79% of all locally-acquired diagnoses in 2018. Following three years of increasing numbers of diagnoses among MSM, the numbers diagnosed in 2017 and 2018 have declined to numbers similar to those reported between 2003 and 2010. This decline was seen particularly in MSM reported to have been infected in NZ. Changes within the last few years including treating all HIV positive individuals, availability of pre-exposure prophylaxis, and ongoing campaigns emphasizing the use of condoms and regular HIV testing are likely to have impacted on this decline.

Amongst heterosexual men and women, the number diagnosed with HIV peaked in the mid-2000s, declined around 2009 and has remained relatively stable at low numbers since then. In the years 2015-2018, around half (55%) of heterosexual men and women had a CD4 count <350 at the time of diagnosis – an indication of prolonged undiagnosed infection. Early HIV testing, therefore, needs to be emphasised and clinicians need to consider HIV as a possibility in people with compatible clinical features.

There has been an ongoing small number of HIV diagnoses among people who inject drugs. In 2018, however, there were six MSM who also reported injecting drug use as a possible means of infection – the highest number ever in one year. HIV prevention needs to continue to be maintained in this high-risk population.