In the early days of the epidemic in North America, HIV/AIDS mostly affected gay men. As a result, there has been an enduring association between the stigma of HIV/AIDS and the stigma of homosexuality.

In 1991, the Canadian AIDS Society stated, “The link in people’s minds between homosexuality and AIDS is so firmly established that discrimination against people with HIV/AIDS is inseparable from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.”

In the United States, HIV infection and AIDS have had a tremendous effect on men who have sex with men (MSM). MSM accounted for 71% of all HIV infections among male adults and adolescents in 2005. They represented 53% of all people receiving an HIV/AIDS diagnosis in 2005.

An estimated 207,000 MSM are living with HIV/AIDS in the US, representing 67% of male adults and adolescents living with AIDS and 52% of all people living with AIDS. MSM account for a higher proportion of AIDS cases than any other group.

An estimated 19,000 MSM received a diagnosis of AIDS in 2005. An estimated 6,000 MSM with AIDS died in 2005, accounting for 60% of all men and 45% of all people with AIDS who died that year.

Since the beginning of the epidemic, an estimated 450,000 MSM had received a diagnosis of AIDS, accounting for 68% of male adults and adolescents who received a diagnosis of AIDS and 54% of all people who received a diagnosis of AIDS.

Since the beginning of the epidemic, an estimated 260,000 MSM with AIDS had died, accounting for 68% of male adults and adolescents with AIDS who had died and 57% of all people with AIDS who had died.

The first HIV infections among US MSM occurred around 1978. The CDC declared the disease an epidemic in 1981, and the incidence peaked in 1984. The Reagan administration urged the public by 1986 not to panic since AIDS was confined to gay men and IV drug users. The following year, Sen. Jesse Helms attempted to prevent funding of AIDS education efforts that "encourage or promote homosexual sexual activity."

In the 1980s, many leaders emerged within the gay community to address the need for risk reduction, despite criticisms from some of their peers that these leaders were undermining hard-won rights of sexual expression.
From the beginning of the epidemic, HIV/AIDS was associated with gay men. AIDS was called the gay plague, gay cancer, and Gay Related Immune Deficiency (GRID). The epidemic intensified and extended discrimination against gay men.

The 1993 film *Philadelphia* was a landmark film for many reasons, but especially for the fact that it put a human face and emotions with homosexuality and HIV/AIDS. It showed the realities of the disease, and how gay men were being hit especially hard by it. The film had 53 gay men in it in various scenes, and film turned to reality when within a year of shooting, 43 of those men had died as a result of AIDS.

In 1991, Earvin "Magic" Johnson publicly announced that he was HIV-positive, becoming the first major celebrity to acknowledge contracting the virus through heterosexual sex.

The number of HIV diagnoses for MSM decreased during the 1990s, but recent data show an increase in HIV diagnoses for this group.

The number of HIV/AIDS diagnoses among MSM increased 13% from 2001 through 2005.

Additionally, racial disparities exist with regard to HIV diagnoses within the MSM population. A recent study, conducted in 5 large US cities, found that HIV prevalence among black MSM (46%) was more than twice that among white MSM (21%).

A venue-based study of more than 5,000 MSM aged 15 to 29 years in 6 US cities found that 10% of the men were infected with HIV; of these men, 77% were unaware of their infection (91% of black MSM with infection were unaware of being infected). For these gay and bisexual men with HIV, disclosure of HIV status may entail disclosure of their sexual orientation, and thus may lead men to keep it quiet.

The recent overall increase in HIV diagnoses for MSM, coupled with racial disparities, strongly points to a continued need for appropriate prevention and education services tailored for specific subgroups of MSM, especially those who are members of minority races/ethnicities.

Sexual risk factors account for most HIV infections in MSM. These factors predominantly include having anal sex without a condom continues to be a significant threat to the health of MSM. Unprotected anal sex with casual partners is an increasing concern. Recent US surveys of MSM document high rates of unsafe sex.

The use of alcohol and illegal drugs continues to be prevalent among some MSM and is linked to risk factors for HIV infection and other STDs. Substance use can increase the risk for HIV transmission through the tendency toward risky sexual behaviors while under the influence and through sharing needles or other injection equipment.
Transmission categories of male adults and adolescents with HIV/AIDS diagnosed during 2005

No. = 27,455