

# Special Populations

## HIGHLIGHTS

- According to a 2004 Peel Public Health survey of high school students, more than a quarter (26%) reported that they had sex in the past 12 months.
- One-third (34%) of sexually active students in Peel reported they had three or more sexual partners in their lifetime.
- A 2002 survey of Canadian youth found that approximately half of all grade 9 students believed that HIV/AIDS could be cured if it is caught early.
- Among persons under age 20, incidence of HIV/AIDS in Peel was 0.3 per 100,000 in males and 0.7 per 100,000 in females. The high rates of sexually transmitted infections in this age group are concerning because existing STIs increase the transmission risk of HIV.
- In December 1998, Ontario's Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care recommended that all pregnant women be tested for HIV. In Peel Region, approximately 45% of pregnant women were tested for HIV in 1999 but this increased to 94% in 2006. In 2006, one woman tested positive for HIV out of over 16,000 pregnant women screened.



## YOUTH

Youth are particularly at risk for HIV infection since this is the time of exploration around behaviours related to sexual activity, alcohol and drug use.

According to a 2004 Peel Public Health survey of high school students, more than a quarter (26%) reported that they had sex in the past 12 months. Close to two-thirds (62%) of sexually-active students were 15 years of age or younger when they first had sex.<sup>15</sup> Forty per cent of sexually-active students indicated that they were sometimes or always high or drunk when they had sex. Almost one-third (32%) of sexually-active grade 9 students reported that they did not use any form of birth control or protection during sex.<sup>15</sup>

Forty-two per cent of sexually-active high school students reported they had only had sex with one person in their lifetime. However, one-third (34%) of sexually active students reported they had three or more sexual partners in their lifetime. Females (48%) were significantly more likely than males (36%) to report they had had sexual intercourse with only one person in their lifetime while males (27%) were significantly more likely than females (19%) to report they had four or more sexual partners in their lifetime.<sup>15</sup>

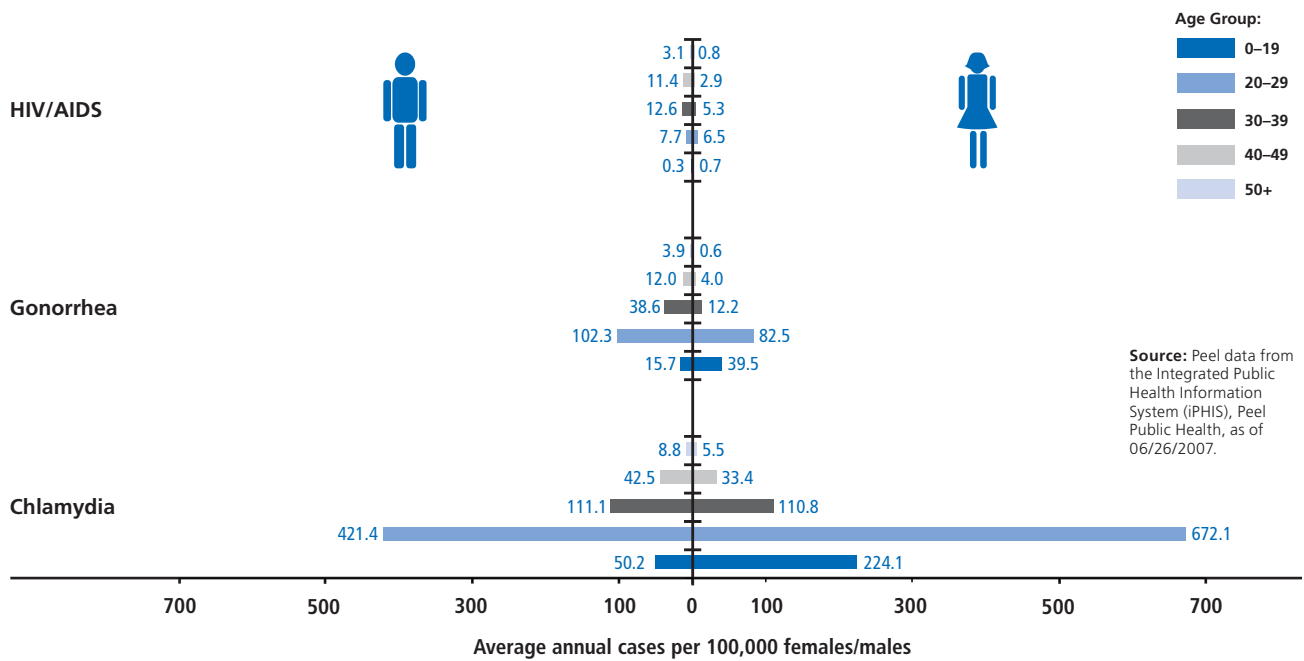
According to a 2002 survey of Canadian youth in grades 7, 9 and 11, there is a lack of understanding of HIV and AIDS. For example, a high proportion of youth incorrectly believe that there are vaccines available to prevent AIDS

(64% of males and 64% of females in grade 9, 49% of males and 37% of females in grade 10).<sup>16</sup> One of the most alarming findings of the survey was that approximately half of all grade 9 students (53% of males, 51% of females) believed that HIV/AIDS could be cured if it is caught early. This proportion was even higher among grade 7 males (78%) and females (66%).<sup>16</sup>

Among persons under age 20, incidence of HIV/AIDS in Peel was 0.3 per 100,000 in males and 0.7 per 100,000 in females (see Figure 14 below).

The high rates of sexually transmitted infections in this age group are concerning because existing STIs increase the transmission risk of HIV.

**Figure 14: Incidence of Selected Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) by Age Group and Sex, Region of Peel, 1997–2006 Combined**



Source: Peel data from the Integrated Public Health Information System (iPHIS), Peel Public Health, as of 06/26/2007.

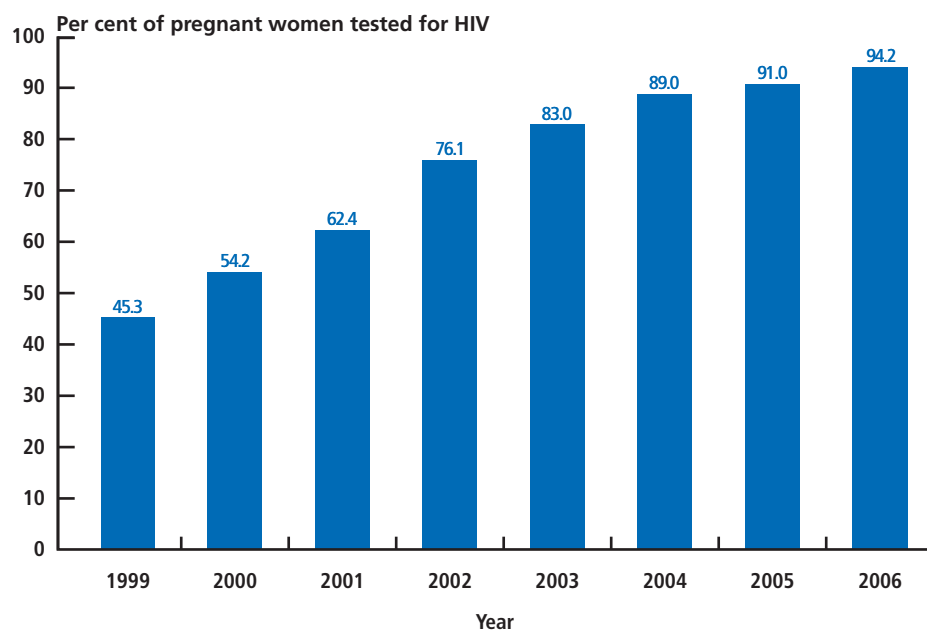
## HIV SCREENING OF PREGNANT WOMEN

Worldwide, an estimated 2.1 million women and 530,000 children under the age of 15 years were newly infected with HIV in 2006.<sup>1</sup> Most of these children were infected before or during birth or through breastfeeding. The Canadian Medical Association, College of Family Physicians of Canada and The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada have recommended that all women considering pregnancy or who are pregnant be screened for HIV.

In December 1998, Ontario's Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care recommended that all pregnant women be tested for HIV.<sup>11</sup> In Peel Region, approximately 45% of pregnant women were tested for HIV in 1999 but this increased to 94% in 2006 (see Figure 15 below). In 2006, only one woman in Peel tested positive for HIV out of over 16,000 pregnant women screened. Out of over 93,000 pregnant women in Peel tested for HIV between 1999 and 2006, 23 were HIV-positive (0.3%).

Between 1994 and 2005 in Ontario, of the 618 HIV-infected pregnant women, 121 HIV-infected infants were delivered. This translates into a vertical transmission rate of 20%. Of these infants, 55% were born to women from HIV-endemic countries.

**Figure 15: Proportion of Pregnant Women Tested for HIV, Region of Peel\*, 1999–2006**



**\*Notes:** Not all of those tested were residents of Peel. In addition, not all pregnant women seek prenatal care, and some of those receiving prenatal care may not consent to a blood test for HIV.

It is difficult to know the exact number of pregnant women in Peel region who seek testing because some pregnant women opt not to be tested for HIV and others do not seek prenatal care prior to delivery. The data presented here can also include women living outside Peel Region but who were tested by Peel physicians. As well, women who live in Peel Region but are tested anonymously are not included.

**Source:** HIV Laboratory, Laboratories Branch, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Analysis by Ontario HIV Epidemiologic Monitoring Unit, March 19, 2007.