

Syphilis prevalence and incidence among HIV negative men who have sex with men and transgender women in Buenos Aires, Argentina

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Background

Syphilis is an important public health problem worldwide; in Argentina the rate of syphilis has increased in recent years, reaching 52.1 people per 100,000 inhabitants in 2018 .

Objective

To evaluate the prevalence and incidence of syphilis among HIV negative men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender women (TGW)

Methods

We conducted a retrospective cohort analysis that included all the syphilis tests performed among HIV negative MSMs and TGWs at substantial risk of HIV infection¹ between March 2018-December 2019.

¹Substantial risk of HIV infection :
Any of the following situations in the last 6 months:

>5 sexual partners

Anal unprotected sex

Use of drugs

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

Transactional sex

Diagnosis of syphilis was made by the combination of nontreponemal tests (venereal disease research laboratory, VDRL) and treponemal tests (fluorescent treponemal antibody absorption, FTA-ABS or Syphilis rapid tests, Determine or SD-Bioline) using both, the standard and the reverse algorithms. PCR in ulcers were performed if available.

Results

276 participants (166 MSMs and 110 TGWs) were included .At baseline 12 MSMs and 28 TGWs had serology compatible with untreated syphilis. During follow-up, MSMs provided 135.4 person-years of follow-up (PYFU) and 19 new syphilis cases, while TGWs provided 22.9 PYFU and 10 incidental syphilis.

	MSM n=166	TGW N=110
Median age	32.8	28.1
Prevalence	7.2 (95%CI 4.1-12.2)	25.45 (95%CI 18.2-34.3)
Incidence	14/100-PYFU	43/100-PYFU*

* Only 1/3 of TGWs had follow-up

Conclusions

HIV negative high-risk MSMs and TGWs in Argentina have an extremely high prevalence and incidence of syphilis, highlighting the importance of testing frequently STIs among this population

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