**INTRODUCTION**

In spite of the preventive efforts to reduce the incidence of HIV infection in the last decade, 10 million young people age 13–24 years are infected with HIV worldwide. In United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported an increase in the estimated number of new HIV infections among persons aged 15–19 years; 2790 new cases in 2001 increased to 4113 new cases in 2005. As of December 2006, 16% of all reported AIDS cases in Puerto Rico have been diagnosed in patients aged 20–29 years. Considering that the typical incubation period between HIV infection and development of AIDS is 10 years; many of these young adults must have been infected during adolescence. A descriptive study of patients infected with HIV in the adolescence in Bayamón, Puerto Rico, revealed many of these patients had not completed high school and were frequent substance abusers, particularly of tobacco, cocaine, and heroin. The 2000 census data from Puerto Rico found that 8% of the Puerto Rican population were adolescents between the ages of 10 to 14 and of those, 48.1% were girls. In a survey of Puerto Rican young people, a high proportion of Puerto Rican adolescents were sexually active (28%).

Teenagers are susceptible to many health problems, such as drug use and sexually transmitted diseases. Adolescents are a high-risk group because 1) they are in an age of sexual identity exploration, and they experiment with illicit drugs; 2) they are impulsive, and they are influenced by their peer group; and 3) they don’t feel vulnerable because they cannot foresee long-term consequences. Adolescents’ attitudes toward risk behaviors are often the denial of any chance of infection and the adoption of the belief that they are invulnerable. Fear of contracting AIDS decreases substantially as knowledge of the disease increases.

Alcohol and drug use could be considered risky behavior since they reduce inhibitions. Alcohol and drug use are the most important predictors of sexually transmitted disease and HIV infection among high school students; they also have a strong effect on the age of sexual debut. Sexually active students in Puerto Rico have more exposure to drug use and alcohol than sexually inactive students. In 2004, 22.6% of high school students reported that they used alcohol for the first time when they were ≤11 years of age.

A lack of HIV/AIDS knowledge and incorrect HIV/AIDS information are associated with HIV infection. Among Puerto Rican high school students, poor knowledge of HIV/AIDS was a predictor of risky practices. A sample of seventh grade students in Puerto Rico had inadequate knowledge of HIV transmission modes and possible preventive behaviors.

Many HIV risk reduction interventions among adolescents have been conducted in the United States, and most reported an increase in knowledge amongst the participants. Intervention programs in adolescents may be strengthened by including the following: