A recent study conducted by the UCR School of Medicine revealed that individuals diagnosed late in the course of a Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection may be more likely to spread the virus to others.

Led by assistant professor at the Center for Healthy Communities, Brandon Brown, the extensive study involved examining the medical records (given by the California Department of Public Health) of more than 1,300 Riverside County residents. In an interview, Brown said that he, along with Aaron T. Gardner and Rachaline Napier of the Riverside University Health System Public Health, initiated the study to "see (the) statistics of those diagnosed late with HIV (in Riverside County), because people right now are not getting tested."

By examining their medical records, the three researchers were able to discover different metrics pertaining to the testing statuses of the majority of the HIV/AIDS infected in the sixth most HIV/AIDS-impacted county in the state. They found that the elder (between 45 and 64 years of age), Hispanic and foreign-born populations of Riverside County were more likely to test late for HIV, while those who live in the eastern part of the county were more likely to test early.

"(I'm) not really (surprised)," Brown said when asked about the results of the study. "A lot of (late testing happens) because of (a lack of) access to health care and routine health checkups," which he said is commonplace for most of the Hispanic and foreign-born populations. However, Brown also named other contributing factors, including the stigma of receiving and administering an HIV examination and general doctor ineptitude.

"Even though the HIV testing is free … they (the HIV-infected) aren't testing probably because of the stigma. The people feel uncomfortable (and) the doctors feel uncomfortable (to bring up the topic). Also, in general, doctors may not be as likely (to administer the test) or be trained as well in their institutions for the elderly, since it (the exam procedure) is more complex (for them)." However, research conducted by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows that an extended failure to treat HIV/AIDS is incredibly dangerous.

"It's not a good situation," Brown agreed. "When HIV isn't treated, all of the the things we take for granted (in our immune systems) begin malfunctioning … and the HIV might become AIDS." He added that when HIV is detected late or not tested for at all, the likelihood of transmitting the virus to others increases greatly.

According to the CDC, Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), the most serious stage of HIV infection, is contracted when "a person living with HIV gets certain infections (called opportunistic infections, or OIs)," which include tuberculosis, cervical cancer, and pneumonia, among others.

"A lot of people are not getting tested early, and some not at all … although we can't really measure it (HIV transmissions), we can definitely say that lower transmission rates are connected with those who test early."

Moving forward, Brown says that researchers want to focus their next project on the intervention of already infected individuals rather than the education of late and non-testers.

"We want to help those who have already tested (and are infected) because the stigma (associated with HIV testing) makes it hard (to address pre-testers) ... we're planning to give the information found in this study to Get Tested Coachella Valley, so that they can focus on helping the (afflicted) populations."

According to their 2015 annual report, Get Tested Coachella Valley is a new, $5 million public health initiative spanning over the course of three years committed to reducing HIV transmissions by "making voluntary HIV testing standard and routine medical practice, making HIV testing and care available to everyone, including those who don't see healthcare providers on a regular basis, and addressing fear, judgement, and stigma by educating the community-in both English and Spanish-about HIV testing and how to prevent infection."