HIV is on the rise in China’s gay community. According to \_\_, the HIV rate among gay men in China is about 8 percent in 2015. That’s up from 6 percent in 2011. This is disproportionally higher than China’s general population where the rate is only \_\_. By contrast, the rate of HIV positive gay men in the United States is \_\_, but it has flatted since \_\_.

There are many reasons for the rise of HIV . Wang Xiaodong, the founder of Chengdu Tongle, a nonprofit dedicated to HIV prevention, said that gay men are much more likely to contract HIV than the general population. “For the general population, the HIV rate might be point zero one percent. It’s point one percent in some places. But for the gay community, HIV positive rate might be as high as 10 percent. The difference is huge,” He said. “Also without any protection, gay sex is much more likely to transmit HIV than straight sex.”

Dr. Liao Meizhen, who works for Shandong Province CDC in China, said not enough people are using condoms in the gay community.

“In Shandong Province, the use rate of condom use in the gay community is only in the range of 40 to 50 percent in the latest month ,” Liao said. “I did personal interviews with some gay men about the use of condoms. They prefer pleasure over safety. The reason could be that there’s too much oppression on gay sex, and then they feel condom prevents them from getting the pleasure they want. Especially those gay men in heterosexual marriages, they have experienced long term pressure not to have gay sex. And when they do have it, they tend to engage in high risk sex.”

Liao said the CDC has limited resources. “Shandong Province has over 100 counties, and each county has a population over one million people. The least populated county has three hundred thousand to half a million people. But each county has only one to three CDC staff dedicated to HIV prevention.”

The lack of sex education also contributes to the rise of HIV, especially in gay youth. “It’s a Chinese tradition that we don’t talk about sex,” Zhang Beichuan, a professor at Qingdao University's Medical School said. Zhang has been researching gay men and HIV since 1990s. “Did Sun Yat-sen talk about sex? Did Chiang Kai-shek talk about sex? Did Mao Zedong talk about sex? Deng Xiaoping didn’t talk about sex. Hua Guofeng didn’t talk about sex. Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang didn’t talk about sex. Xi Jinping didn’t talk about sex. It’s not about party politics. It’s a heritage of anti-sex culture,” he said, describing a long history of Chinese leaders who never addressed such taboo subjects.

According to a survey commissioned by the United Nations Population Fund, among the young people in China who are sexuall active and are aged from 15 to 24, half of them didn’t use any birth control options during their first intercourse.

According to the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the number of HIV positive high school and college students increased sharply by 35 percent each year from 2011 to 2015. But HIV rates hit gay students much harder than straight students. The Chinese CDC also reports that from 2014 to October 2015, gay students accounted for more than 80 percent of new student HIV infections.

Homosexuality was a crime in China until 1997, and was considered as a mental illness until 2001. Being gay is still stigmatized in much of China today.

Zhang Beichuan estimates that China has twenty million gay men, and about eighty percent of them are married to or will marry women. There are concerns about HIV positive married gay men transmitting the virus to their wives, and then having it spread into the heterosexual community.

Wang Xiaodong is the founder of Chengdu Tongle, a nonprofit that provides HIV testing and care to the gay community. He’s not that worried about the straight world: “a gay man’s sex activity with his wife is not that frequent. Especially after they have children, they have even less sex, because a straight marriage is just a cover for him.”

Zhang said the HIV infection rates in the gay community might be overestimated. “For example, if China has 10 million sexually active men who have sex with men, and 5 percent of them are HIV positive, we will have 500,000 HIV positive MSM (men having sex with men). That is to say every year there are 100,000 MSM who have HIV outbreak. But every year we only have 300,000 to 400,000 HIV outbreak in the whole country overall. There’s a statistics discrepancy.”

Dr. Li Hui, said it’s time to focus on the HIV prevention in the general population before it’s too late.

In the end, HIV drugs are free in China, provided by the Chinese government. The CDC is relying on nonprofits to reach out to the gay community. However, NGOs are having a difficult time to register and have a legal status.