



# Aboriginal Youth and HIV/AIDS: The Facts



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The Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network (CAAN) is a national organization which deals with HIV/AIDS in the Aboriginal community. CAAN has a mission to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS and to support those now living with it. HIV/AIDS among Aboriginal young people is rising and this fact sheet will explain how.

## What is HIV/AIDS?

HIV is a virus in North America for over twenty years. It attacks the human immune system, which is what people need to fight off simple things like a cold or flu. HIV stands for Human Immuno-deficiency Virus. AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

HIV is believed to cause AIDS. If you have tested HIV-positive, it does not mean you automatically have AIDS. People who test HIV-positive can spread HIV to someone else, even if you feel totally healthy. A blood test is what is used to find out if you have HIV. Unless you have the facts and go for a HIV test you may not know that you have HIV.

Only a doctor can tell someone they have AIDS. You can be infected with HIV for a long time (more than 10 years) before you develop AIDS. AIDS happens when your body cannot fight off infections and your T-cell count goes way down. T-cells are found in your blood system and help fight infections.

## THERE IS NO CURE FOR HIV OR AIDS!

There is no cure for HIV or AIDS, but it is 100% preventable. There are powerful pills that can help people with HIV/AIDS live longer, healthier lives. These medications often make people feel sick from the side effects like upset stomach and diarrhea or worse. The pills are NOT a cure; they only help people live longer.

## Who can get HIV?

Any one can get HIV/AIDS. There are many options to reduce or eliminate the risk of HIV infection. It is not who you are, but what you do that puts you at risk for HIV or other sexually transmitted infections. Here are some ways:

- Blood to blood (like sharing needles to inject drugs.)
- Exchange of body fluids (vaginal or anal intercourse without a condom. Even oral sex can have some risks if there are sores inside the mouth.)

- Mother to child (through breastfeeding or when the mother gives birth.)

Almost one out of every four youth who tests HIV-positive in Canada is Aboriginal. Aboriginal young women; Straight guys and Two-Spirit (Gay/Bisexual/ Transgendered) young men who have unprotected sex are becoming infected with HIV more and more.

## What we know for Aboriginal young people under 30 years old!

Among new positive HIV test reports and reported AIDS diagnoses, Aboriginal cases are younger than non-Aboriginal cases. Remember, it takes many years after getting infected with HIV before you develop AIDS. AIDS cases tell us what happened about ten years ago. HIV cases tell us what is happening now.

HIV data from the Centre for Infectious Disease Prevention and Control tells us that 26.5% of new HIV infections are among Aboriginal youth compared to 19% in non-Aboriginal HIV infections. This means Aboriginal youth are being infected more than non-Aboriginal youth.

## REMEMBER!!!!

- HIV is 100% preventable (you can avoid getting HIV/AIDS.)
- Your brain is the body's first defense against HIV/AIDS (you can decide what to do or not to do.)
- Feeling good enough about yourself like you are worth protecting can help protect against HIV/AIDS (you are worth it.)
- Find out where to get a blood test for HIV and talk to someone to see if you should take one. Knowledge is Power!
- Know your sexual partner very well before having unprotected sex and talk openly with them.