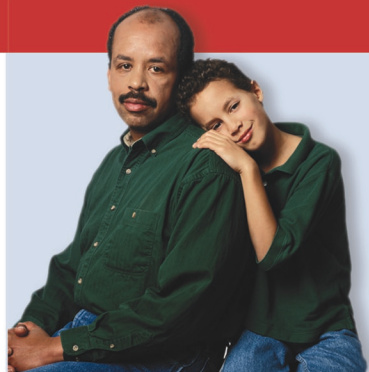


Talking With  
YOUNG PEOPLE About



# HIV and AIDS



a handbook  
for parents  
and caregivers

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# Why it is Important to Talk with Young People about HIV and AIDS

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HIV is a serious virus that leads to AIDS. This disease is killing people of all ages, all over the world. Many young people in the United States have HIV or AIDS or could get HIV by having sex or using drugs at early ages. There are medications that have helped people living with HIV or AIDS live longer, healthier lives. Some people have lived for more than 20 years and have taken medications for more than 10 years. But, there is no cure.

Young people hear about HIV and AIDS on TV and radio and from their friends. They read about it in newspapers, in magazines, and on the Internet. The things they hear about HIV and AIDS may not be 100% true. Do your children know the truth about HIV and AIDS? Will your children know how to protect themselves from HIV? You can help fight this disease by giving your children the facts. The sooner you talk with your children about HIV and AIDS, the more able they will be to make healthy choices about sex and drugs. When you talk with your children, you:

- Give your children the facts about HIV, in a way that is right for their age.
- Help them make healthy choices to protect themselves for life.
- Let your children know what things are important to you and what you want for them.

# Facts about HIV and AIDS

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You do not have to be an HIV/AIDS expert to talk with your children about it. You do not need to have all the answers to their questions. There are many places to go to find those answers. The facts in this section are written to help you, as a parent or caregiver, learn more about HIV and AIDS. Later in this book, you will learn what facts about HIV and AIDS may be best for children to learn at different ages. It will help to know the basics yourself to make sure that you give your children the facts.

## What is HIV?

HIV is the *Human Immunodeficiency Virus*. It is the virus that causes AIDS. You may hear that someone is *HIV-infected* or has *HIV disease*. Both terms mean that the person has HIV in his or her body and can pass (transmit) the virus to other people.

HIV attacks the body's immune system. The immune system protects the body from getting germs and disease. Over time, most people with HIV become less able to fight off the germs that get into their bodies every day. These germs usually do not make a healthy person sick. But when the immune system gets weaker from HIV, these germs can cause infections and cancers that can kill a person. There are medications that fight HIV and help the immune system stay stronger for a longer time. But, there is no cure to get HIV out of the body or a shot (vaccine) to prevent HIV. Once a person has HIV infection, he or she has it for life and can pass the virus to others.

## What is AIDS?

AIDS stands for *Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome*. It is the late stage of HIV infection. A person has AIDS when the immune system becomes very weak from HIV infection or when he or she gets one or more serious illnesses because of the HIV.

People who are infected with HIV often do not get AIDS for up to ten years or longer. Some people have lived with HIV infection for more than 20 years. HIV medicines can help people with HIV live longer, healthier lives.

## How do you get infected with HIV?

Your age, sex, race, ethnic group, religion, income, or sexual orientation does not matter - anyone can get infected with HIV.

### You can get HIV in these ways:

- By having sex without using a condom with someone who has HIV.
- By sharing needles, syringes, or other equipment or works (spoons, cotton, bottle caps) that have already been used by someone who has HIV to shoot drugs, steroids, or even vitamins or medicine.
- Women with HIV can pass the virus to their babies during pregnancy, delivery, or breastfeeding.
- Healthcare workers can get HIV if they get stuck with needles that have blood or body fluids with HIV. This can happen by accident at work.

### You cannot get HIV from:

- *casual contact* – being near someone who has HIV or by shaking hands, touching, or hugging someone with HIV
- someone with HIV sneezing or coughing near you or on you
- someone's tears, saliva, or sweat
- sharing drinking glasses, plates, forks, knives, or spoons
- using public bathrooms and drinking fountains
- mosquito bites or other bug bites
- swimming pools or hot tubs
- pets

## How can you prevent HIV?

**Do not have sex.** This is sometimes called abstinence. Not having sex is the only sure way to not get HIV. But, using a latex male condom or a female condom can greatly lower the chances of passing HIV through sex. See page 16 for instructions on how to use a condom.

**Do not share needles to inject anything.** You can totally protect yourself from getting HIV from needles and syringes by not shooting drugs or sharing needles for any reason. If you cannot stop shooting drugs, take these steps to lower the chances of getting HIV:

- Always use new, clean needles and syringes.
- If you cannot get new, clean needles and syringes, clean your needles and works with bleach and water right after using them and just before using them again.
- Do not use other drugs, like alcohol, marijuana, crystal meth, ecstasy, cocaine, or crack. These drugs can prevent you from making good choices about sex and about using new, clean needles and works. If you are drunk or high, you may not protect yourself and others from HIV.

## Can you tell if someone has HIV?

No. People may look and feel healthy even though they have HIV. Many people who have the virus do not even know it because they do not have symptoms for many years.

### **It is a Fact: Young People are at Risk for HIV and AIDS!**

*About half of all high school students in the United States have sex. And at least half of all new HIV cases in the United States are among people under age 25.*

(U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004)

## How can you find out if you have HIV?

The only sure way to tell if you have HIV is to get an HIV test, either a blood test or an oral fluid test, which takes a swab from the inside of the mouth.

- An **anonymous** HIV test is when you do not give your name. You are given an ID number to get your results.
- A **confidential** HIV test means you give your name when you are tested. Your test results become part of your private health record.
- In some places you can get a **rapid HIV test** and get results on the same day. If your test shows that you might have HIV, you will need a second test to learn for sure if you have HIV.

Any person, no matter what age, can be tested if he or she understands:

- what the test is for;
- what the test result means; and
- the types of care and treatment for people who test positive for HIV.

Before the test, an HIV test counselor or health care provider will make sure that the person getting tested understands these three points. Taking the test can be a hard choice for a young person. Try to support your child's choice and offer help.

Some clinics offer free, anonymous HIV tests. Many local health department clinics, community health centers, hospitals, family planning clinics, and doctors offer confidential HIV tests. Call the phone numbers at the end of this booklet to find testing sites near you.

## Are young people at risk for getting HIV/AIDS?

Yes. Anyone of any age can get HIV by having sex without a condom or by sharing needles. At least half of all new HIV cases in the United States are among young people (under age 25, including teens). Most young people get HIV by having sex without using a condom. They are also getting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) more than ever before. Once you have an STD, it is easier to get HIV.

# How to Get Started

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Make this the start of many talks about HIV. You do not have to cover all the facts in one talk. Let your children know that it is okay to talk with you about this and other serious topics.

## Here are some tips for getting started:

- **Ask your children what they already know about HIV and AIDS.** This can be a good way to start talking and to find out any wrong facts they may have.
- **Ask your children what they have learned about HIV and AIDS in school** and how they feel about it. You can then give your children more facts and talk about how you would like them to stay protected from HIV.
- **Talk with your children's teachers** to find out what they teach in school about HIV/AIDS.
- **Look for reasons to bring up the topic.** You may be watching a TV show where a person has to decide whether or not to have sex. Or, you may be with your children and hear a news story about AIDS on the radio. These are good times to ask your children, "What do you think about this?" and to let them know what you think and feel.
- **If your children have questions you cannot answer,** admit that you do not know the answer. Offer to find the answer together. See page 18 for phone numbers and websites that can help.



# What to Say to Your Children about HIV and AIDS

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What you say to your children about HIV depends on their age, whether or not they can understand the facts, and their experiences with HIV. For example, young children may not be ready to learn some facts that teenagers need to know to protect themselves. Other kids may know people living with HIV or AIDS. The next three parts of this booklet give you ideas about what to say about HIV and AIDS to children of different ages: young children (ages 5 to 8), older children (ages 9 to 12), and teenagers (ages 13 to 19).

## Talking with Young Children (Ages 5 to 8)

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Children this age may be more aware of HIV/AIDS than you may think. But they may also have fears and wrong facts about HIV/AIDS that you can help clear up. Ask your children to tell you what they know or have heard about HIV/AIDS and start from that point.

This age is not too early to give facts that will help children know how HIV and AIDS work. Kids this age can learn the basic idea that germs cause sickness. If you teach the basics about how to stop sickness and how to make good choices to stay healthy, it will help your children understand HIV/AIDS when they are older. Because people die of AIDS, be ready to talk about death and dying. It may help to talk with your children about someone close to you who has died.

## What to tell young children about HIV/AIDS:

### Healthy habits

- Wash your hands to prevent the spread of germs.
- Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze.
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean.
- If you are bleeding, find an adult you know and trust who can help.

### HIV is hard to get and share

- HIV is a virus (germ) that causes AIDS. HIV gets from one person's blood into another person's blood and makes that person sick.
- HIV/AIDS is not in everyone's blood.
- You cannot get HIV by reading, playing, talking, hugging, kissing, or eating with someone who has the virus.
- Do not touch blood. If you find needles or sharp objects, stay away from them. Getting shots from a doctor or nurse is okay. Do not trade blood *as blood brothers or blood sisters*.
- Do not be afraid if you meet someone with HIV or AIDS. Treat that person the same way you want to be treated when you are sick – with caring and kindness. People do not get HIV or AIDS because they are bad.

# Talking with Older Children (Ages 9 to 12)

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Children in this age group begin learning more about HIV/AIDS at school, from TV and movies, or from the Internet. They may know someone who is living with HIV or someone who has died from AIDS. If they have the wrong facts about HIV and how it is spread, you can help them get the right facts.

## Tips for talking with kids about sex and drugs

At this age, children's bodies and feelings change fast. They often feel very self-aware or awkward about their bodies. They may be more curious about sex and want to express their feelings about sex. They also may want to try alcohol and drugs.

You may feel that children in the fourth or fifth grades are too young to learn about sex and drugs. You may choose to talk to your children about these things now or wait until they are older. It is up to you. Even if you wait to have your first talk until your children are older, you can still tell them that people get HIV by having sex and by sharing needles and drug works. Kids this age feel a lot of *peer pressure* — pressure from friends and other kids their age to try new things that can hurt them (like smoking and drinking). All of these are reasons to talk with your children before they start taking chances with sex and alcohol or other drugs.

## HIV/AIDS basics for older children:

- **Review the basics about getting HIV** and how to prevent it — do not use alcohol or other drugs, do not have sex, and do not share needles and other drug works.
- **If you talk about sex and drugs** — tell you children it is better to wait until you are an adult to have sex and to make sex part of an adult, loving relationship. People who do have sex should always use a condom. Having sex without a condom is a risk for getting HIV.

- **Using alcohol or drugs** makes it harder to make good choices — like not having sex and always using a condom if you do have sex.
- **Do not trade blood** in *blood brothers* or *blood sisters* games.
- **Do not share needles for any reason** — even to inject insulin (for diabetes), steroids, or vitamins or for tattooing or body piercing. If you do inject drugs, always use a new, clean needle.

**Abstinence:  
The Only Way to  
Stay 100% Safe!**

*Abstinence means not to do something at all. The only 100% sure way to stay protected from HIV is not to have sex and not to shoot drugs. Not using alcohol and drugs (even drugs that you do not inject, like marijuana, cocaine, ecstasy, or other pills) can also help prevent HIV. How? When people drink and do drugs, they may make bad choices and take chances and may not protect themselves from HIV.*

## Peer Pressure and Bullying

Kids in this age group can be mean to each other. They pressure or threaten others to try risky things like smoking cigarettes, drinking, doing drugs, or having sex. They make fun of or bully other kids who will not take chances. Even friends sometimes make each other feel “uncool” for not taking chances. Let your children know that real friends will not pressure them or make fun of them for playing it safe. Tell your children it is okay to talk to adults they trust (a teacher, parent, or older relative) if they feel unhappy or pressured.

# Talking with Teens (Ages 13 to 19)

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Teenagers grow apart from their families and want to do more things on their own. They want to “fit in” with others in their age group. Many teens have strong personal values and make choices every day. But they are also under a lot more pressure to try alcohol and other drugs and to have sex. Your teens may make good choices to stay away from alcohol, drugs, and sex. But they still need to know that they can get HIV or an STD by having sex without a condom or by sharing needles or works — even just once.

## HIV/AIDS basics for teens:

- **Abstinence is the only sure way to prevent the spread of HIV.**  
The best way to protect yourself from HIV is not to have any kind of sex (vaginal, oral, or anal) and not to inject drugs.
- **Use a condom.** Use a latex male condom or a female condom the right way each time you have sex. Other forms of birth control such as the pill, Norplant, or Depo-Provera do not protect you from HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases.
- **Do not use alcohol and other drugs.** They make it harder to say “no” to having sex — or to use a condom if you do have sex.
- **Never share needles** to inject anything.
- **Body piercing or tattooing** needles can also have blood with HIV. If your children are going to get tattoos or body piercings, find an artist who uses only new, clean needles and safe tools.

# Teens, Dating, and Sex: What They are Saying and Doing

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You may hear your teens talk about going out with friends instead of dating. Or, you may hear them talk about *hooking up* or having *friends with benefits*. These terms may not mean anything to you, but they have special meaning for young people. Learn what these terms mean and know what your teens are doing.

Even if teens are not dating, they still feel a lot of pressure to have sex. *Hooking up* or having *friends with benefits* means having oral sex with different people — instead of having vaginal or anal sex with one boyfriend or girlfriend. Teens are having oral sex more often than vaginal or anal sex and at younger ages. Young people see this as a way to keep their virginity and to not get pregnant. Even though oral sex is less risky sex, you can still get HIV and STDs this way or pass these diseases to others.

## Good News About Teen Sex

### ***Fewer teens are having sex:***

*In 1991, 54% of high school students in the United States said they had sex.*

*In 2003, 47% said they had sex.*

(U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004)

Tell your teens that it is always okay to say “no” to sex. They may think that “everyone’s doing it.” Let them know that this is just not true.

# HIV and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

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Young people in the United States are getting STDs more than ever before. Teens need to know how not to get HIV and other STDs.

## STD Basics:

- **HIV is one of many STDs.** STDs, like HIV, are spread from person to person by vaginal, anal, or oral sex. Some STDs are spread by skin-to-skin contact.
- **If you have an STD, it is easier to get HIV.**
- **Most people have no signs of the STD at all.** You may not know if you or your partner has an STD.
- **Some STDs can be cured, some cannot.** STDs that are caused by bacteria — such as gonorrhea, chlamydia, and syphilis — can be treated and cured with medicine. But, STDs that are viruses — like herpes, genital warts, and hepatitis B — can only be treated. They cannot be cured.

- **Take control, get tested.**

The only way to know if you have HIV or another STD is through a test or exam.

To find out more about HIV and STD testing, call one of the hotlines listed on page 18.

### Four Million Teens a Year

*About 15 million people in the United States get an STD each year. Four million of those are teens.*

(U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004)

# Using Condoms to Prevent HIV and Other STDs

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Latex male condoms and female condoms, when used the right way every time, greatly lower the chances of getting HIV and many other STDs. Condoms can prevent the spread of other STDs, like human papillomavirus (HPV) or genital herpes, only when the condom covers all of the infected area or sores.

## Condom Basics:

- **Be prepared.** Always have condoms with you, even if you do not plan to have sex. Never take it for granted that your partner will have condoms — talk with him or her about it before.

### Good News About Teen Sex

#### ***More teens are using condoms:***

*In 1991, 46% of teens in the United States said they used a condom the last time they had sex. In 2003, 63% said they used a condom the last time they had sex.*

(U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004)

- **Use a condom with every partner, every time.** Use a condom even if you think your partner does not have HIV or an STD.
- **Stick with your choice.** If your partner does not want to use a condom, tell him or her that you do not want to have sex without one.
- **How to use a male condom**
  1. Store condoms in a cool place and keep them out of the sun. Check the expiration date (the “use by” date). This date is on the condom box or the condom wrapper. Condoms used after this date may rip or tear.
  2. Open the condom wrapper carefully. Teeth or fingernails can rip the condom.



3. Put on the condom after the penis is hard. If the penis is not circumcised, pull back the foreskin before putting on the condom. Unroll the condom all the way down the penis.
4. Pinch the tip of the condom to leave a little space (about a half inch) at the top. Unroll the condom all the way down the penis.
5. Add a little water-based lubricant (like K-Y jelly) to the outside of the condom. Never use lubricants with oil, like Vaseline or lotion; these can make the condom break.
6. After ejaculation, hold the rim of the condom and pull out while the penis is still hard, so that no semen spills out.

*It is going to take hard work, by people from all over the world, to stop the spread of HIV and AIDS. Talking openly to your children about HIV and AIDS is a big step toward protecting them and others. You should feel good about taking this important step. Keep talking with your children — and keep up the good work!*

# Phone Numbers and Websites for More Information

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## New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute

<http://www.health.state.ny.us/diseases/aids/index.htm>

This website has booklets, posters, and brochures on HIV/AIDS. Materials can also be ordered using the order form on the website. Other information about HIV, like where to get tested in New York State, is also on the website.

## HIV/AIDS Information Hotlines

### New York State Department of Health

HIV/AIDS Hotline (English)

1-800-541-2437

### New York State Department of Health

HIV/AIDS Hotline (Spanish)

1-800-233-7432

### New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

HIV/AIDS Hotline (Spanish/English)

1-800-TALK HIV

### New York State Department of Health

TTY HIV/AIDS information line

1-212-925-9560

Voice callers can use the New York Relay System:

call 711 or 1-800-421-1220 and ask the operator for 1-212-925-9560.

## New York State Education Department

<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/sss/HIV>

This website explains what facts about HIV and AIDS are taught in health education classes in New York State schools. It also has the phone numbers and websites of other groups where you can get more information.

# Phone Numbers and Websites for More Information

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## U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/dhap.htm>

This website has fact sheets and booklets on HIV/AIDS. It has a section of questions and answers about HIV/AIDS that is helpful for parents, caregivers, and teachers.

## Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)

<http://www.siecus.com>

This website has many books, fact sheets, and other information on how to talk about sex with young people of different ages.

## Advocates for Youth

<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/parents/tips.htm>

This group has information and support to help young people make good choices about sex and their health.

## The Parent HIV/AIDS Education Project of Cornell University Cooperative Extension

<http://www.human.cornell.edu/pam/extendsn/hivaid>s

This program has a book called *Talking with Kids about AIDS* to help parents, guardians, and other adults talk with children and teens about HIV/AIDS.