



Department
of Health

AIDS
Institute

health.ny.gov

Talking with Young People

Why it is important to talk with young people about HIV, STDs, hepatitis, and sexual health.

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INTRODUCTION

Many young people are sexually active.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that 39% of U.S high school students surveyed in 2017 report having sex in their lifetime.

Young people hear about sex and the risks of sexual behavior (HIV, STIs and unintended pregnancy) on TV, through social media and from their friends. They may read about it in newspapers, in magazines, and on the internet. What they hear about HIV, STIs, and hepatitis and the risk of pregnancy may not be 100% true. Do your children know the facts? Will they know how to make healthy choices regarding sex? You can help your children protect their overall sexual health by giving them the facts. The sooner you talk with your children about sexual health, the risks that can accompany sexual behaviors, and how to protect themselves, the sooner they will be able to make healthy choices about sex. You do not have to be an expert to talk with your children about HIV, STIs and hepatitis, and you do not need to have all the answers to their questions. There are many places to go to find the answers and the facts in this booklet will help you as a parent or caregiver to learn more.

Facts about HIV.

What are HIV and AIDS?

HIV is the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. Without treatment, it is the virus that causes AIDS.

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. It is the late stage of HIV. A person has AIDS when their immune system becomes very weak from HIV or when they get one or more serious illnesses because their immune system has been weakened by HIV.

HIV treatment is:

Very effective; Has few or no side effects; Can be just 1 pill once a day.

If someone is living with HIV, it is important to get started on medication right away. All studies show that this is the best way to stay healthy. The goal is to start treatment the same day, or within 3 days of learning a person has HIV whenever possible.

HIV treatment is usually so effective that the amount of virus in a person's blood becomes undetectable through lab tests. It does not mean that the person is cured, but the virus is in check.

What is Undetectable = Untransmittable? (U=U)

A person living with HIV who is on HIV treatment and has undetectable virus (virally suppressed) for 6 months or longer, has effectively no risk of passing HIV to a partner **through sex**. However, HIV can still be passed through sharing injection equipment and breastfeeding.

Can you tell if someone has HIV?

No. The only way to know for sure if someone has HIV is to have an HIV test.

What age can someone be tested for HIV?

Providers now offer HIV testing as a routine part of health care to all patients age 13 and older. It is so important that young people know their HIV status that public health law allows adolescents to consent to their own HIV test, without parental or guardian involvement.

HIV

HIV is not transmitted by:

- Casual contact – being near someone who has HIV, shaking hands, touching, or hugging someone with HIV.
- Someone with HIV sneezing or coughing near or on you.
- Tears, saliva, or sweat.
- Sharing drinking glasses, plates, forks, knives, or spoons.
- Public bathrooms and drinking fountains.
- Mosquito bites or other bug bites.
- Swimming pools or hot tubs.
- Pets.

HIV can be prevented by:

- Not having sex - this is also called abstinence. It is the only sure way not to get HIV.
- Using Condoms - Use a male (latex) or female (polyurethane) condom every time someone has vaginal or anal sex.
- Not sharing needles to inject anything.

If someone cannot stop using drugs, they should take these steps to lower the chances of getting HIV:

- Always use new, clean needles and syringes.
- If clean needles and syringes are not available, clean your needles and works with bleach and water right after using them and just before using them again.
- Drugs, like alcohol, marijuana, crystal meth, cocaine, or crack may prevent you from making good choices about sex and about using new, clean needles and works.

HIV can be passed from a mother to her infant during pregnancy, birth or through breast-feeding.

All pregnant women should be tested for HIV as early as possible in their pregnancy. Pregnant women living with HIV can take medication for their health and to prevent transmission of HIV to her baby. Women living with HIV should avoid breast-feeding.

STIs

Facts about STIs.

Sexually transmitted infection (STI) is a term used to cover the many infectious organisms that are spread through sexual activity. There are many sexually transmitted infections including: syphilis, gonorrhea, herpes, chlamydia, genital warts, vaginitis, hepatitis B and HIV. It is possible to have more than one sexually transmitted disease at the same time. Most STIs are treatable. Without treatment, however, these infections can lead to major health problems such as not being able to get pregnant (infertility), permanent brain damage, heart disease, and cancer. Many people with STIs have no symptoms.

An STI can be transmitted if a person has ever:

- Had vaginal, anal or oral sex without using a condom with someone who has an STI, or whose STI status you do not know.
- Had many sex partners.

Lower the risk of getting an STI by:

- Using a latex or polyurethane male condom or female condom the right way, every time.
- Not using drugs and alcohol. They can get in the way of good decision-making.
- Having only one sex partner whose STI status is known.

About 20 million people in the United States get an STI each year. Nearly half are ages 15 to 24 (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

HEPATITIS C

Facts about Hepatitis C.

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus.

It is spread when the blood of an infected person comes in contact with the blood of a person not infected. Most people with hepatitis C don't know they have it.

A person is at risk for hepatitis C if they:

- Inject drugs, even once.
- Get a tattoo or body piercing from an unlicensed tattoo artist or piercer.

The risk of getting hepatitis C from sex is low. The risk increases if someone has sex with many people, has a sexually transmitted disease (STI), has rough sex, or has HIV.

A person can access treatment that leads to a cure in most cases. However, a person can become infected again if they are re-exposed to hepatitis C. Check with your healthcare provider for more information on a cure.

START

How to get started.

Make this the start of many talks about sexual health. Let your children know it is okay to talk with you about these serious topics.

Here are some tips for getting started:

- Ask your children what they already know about sex. This will give you a starting point and help you understand how much your children know.
- Ask your children what they already know about HIV, STIs and hepatitis C. 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, STIs and hepatitis C in school and how they feel about it. You can then share more facts and talk about how you would like them to stay protected from HIV, STIs and hepatitis C.
- Talk with your children's teachers to find out what they teach in school about HIV and STIs.
- Look for opportunities 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 through some form of social media about HIVS, STIs or hepatitis C. These are good times to ask your children, "What do you think about this?" and to let them know what you think and feel.
- Tell your children if they are not comfortable speaking with you, they can speak with another adult they trust and/or a health care provider.

BELOW AGE 9

Children below age 9.

What to tell young children about HIV, STIs, and Hepatitis C

Healthy habits:

- Wash your hands to prevent the spread of germs.
- Cough or sneeze into your arm/elbow.
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean.
- If you are bleeding, find an adult you know and trust who can help.

HIV and hepatitis C are hard to get and share

- HIV and HCV are viruses (germs) that cause disease. When HIV or HCV viruses get from one person's blood into another person's blood, it can make that person sick.
- HIV and hepatitis C are not in everyone's blood.
- You cannot get HIV or hepatitis C 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, hepatitis C. Treat that person the same way you want to be treated. People do not get HIV or any illness because they are bad.

AGES 9-12

Children ages 9-12.

Talking with older children

Children in this age group begin learning more about sex at school, from TV and movies, from the internet and social media. If they have the wrong facts about the risks of sexual behavior, you can help them get the correct facts.

Beginning at age 12, the adolescent may begin to meet with their provider individually. It is helpful to explain this to them so they are prepared for what to expect at their next healthcare appointment.

Tips for talking with kids about sex and drugs

At this age, children's bodies and feelings change quickly. They often feel very self-aware or awkward about their bodies. They may be more curious and want to express their feelings about sex. They may also 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. Even if you wait to have your first talk until your children are older, you can still tell them that people get HIV, STIs, and hepatitis C 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.

Consider HPV Vaccination

HPV vaccination is available, which can prevent the human papillomavirus (HPV) from causing cancer. It can protect against the HPV types that cause the most common sexually associated cancers, including cervical, vaginal, and anal cancers. This vaccine has been approved for females and males aged 9 to 45.

AGES 9-12

Children ages 9-12.

HIV, STIs, and hepatitis C basics for older children:

- Discuss the basics about getting HIV, STIs, and hepatitis C and how to prevent them - do not use alcohol or other drugs, do not have unprotected sex, and do not share needles and other drug works.
- If you talk about sex and drugs, mention:
 - People who have sex should always use a condom. Having sex without a condom is a risk for getting HIV, an STI or pregnant.
 - 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. Injections for any reason should always be done with a new, clean needle.

Peer Pressure and Bullying

Kids in this age group can be mean to each other. Some may pressure or threaten others to try risky things like smoking cigarettes, drinking, doing drugs, or having sex. Some 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.

Staying Safe!

Not using alcohol and drugs (even drugs that you do not inject, like marijuana, cocaine, ecstasy, or other pills) can help prevent HIV, STIs and hepatitis C. How? When people drink and do drugs, they may make risky choices and take chances and may not protect themselves. The only 100% sure way to stay protected from HIV, STIs and hepatitis C is not to have sex and not to share needles.

AGES 13-19

Adolescent ages 13-19.

Talking with teens:

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 good choices every day. But they are also under a lot of 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 they can get pregnant, or get HIV or STIs by having sex without a condom. They can get HIV or hepatitis C by sharing needles or works - even once.

Minor Consent
Regardless of age,
you can say yes
(consent) to HIV
prevention, testing
and treatment.

HIV, STD, and hepatitis C basics to share with your teens:

- Adolescents this age will likely be meeting with their healthcare provider individually. Explain that HIV testing should be offered at least once as a part of routine health care to all individuals age 13 and older, and they have the right to decline.
- Abstinence is the only sure way to prevent the spread of HIV and STIs. The best way for your children to protect themselves is not to have any kind of sex, (vaginal, oral, or anal) and not to inject drugs.
- Use a condom. Use a latex or polyurethane male condom or a female condom the right way each time they have sex. Other forms of birth control such as birth control pills, Norplant, or Depo-Provera may prevent pregnancy, but do not protect your children from HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases.
- Do not use alcohol and other drugs. Being drunk or high may make it harder to say “no” to having sex - or to using a condom if they are having sex.
- Never share needles to inject anything.
- Body piercing or tattooing. If your children are getting tattoos or body piercings, be sure they find an artist who uses only new, clean needles, new ink, and safe tools.

AGES 13-19

Adolescent ages 13-19.

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

You may hear your teens talk about going out with friends instead of dating. Or, you may hear them using terms for having sex you are unfamiliar with. 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. Teens are also having oral sex more often than vaginal or anal sex, and at younger ages. You can still get STIs from oral sex or pass these diseases to others.

Let your teens know that it's OK to talk about the choices they face and that your aim is to keep them healthy and safe. Tell your teens that it is okay to say “no” to sex. They may think that “everyone’s doing it.”

Let them know this is just not true. If your teens are sexually active, talk with them about testing for HIV and STIs. Knowing your HIV and STIs status is key to protecting your health and the health of your sexual partners. Information on HIV and STIs testing can be found under “New York State Department of Health” below. You can tell your teen they can get tested for STIs, HIV, hepatitis C and pregnancy confidentially at the local family planning clinic, health department or primary care provider.

AGES 13-19

Adolescent ages 13-19.

Using Condoms to Prevent HIV and Other STIs

- Male condoms (latex) and female (polyurethane) condoms, when used the right way every time, greatly lower the chances of getting HIV and many other STIs. Condoms can prevent the spread of other STIs, like human papillomavirus (HPV) or genital herpes, only when the condom covers all of the infected area or sores.
- 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. Use a condom with every partner, every time. Use a condom even if you think your partner does not have HIV or an STIs.
- 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.
- Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) is a medicine prescribed by a health care provider. If you are a candidate for PrEP you can consent to the medication on your own. You have to take the PrEP pill once a day, every day to prevent HIV.
- For more information about using condoms: health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/facts/condoms/faqs.htm

News about teen sex

More teens are using condoms: In 2017, 34% of high school students had sexual intercourse within the past three months. Nationwide, over 39% of high school students have ever had sexual intercourse and among those sexually active, 53% of them used a condom (National Youth Risk Behavior Survey).

Talking openly to your children about HIV and STIs is a big step toward protecting them and others. You should feel good about taking this important step. Keep talking!

INFORMATION

New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute

This website has booklets, posters, and brochures on HIV/AIDS. Material can also be ordered using the order form on the website. All material on the website can be downloaded at no cost. Other information about HIV, like where to get tested in New York State, is also available.

health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/publications

HIV/AIDS Information Hotlines

New York State Department of Health, HIV/AIDS Hotline (English)
New York State Department of Health, HIV/AIDS (SIDA) Hotline (Spanish)
New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, HIV/AIDS Hotline (Spanish/English)
New York State Department of Health, TDD HIV/AIDS information line
Voice callers can use the New York Relay System and ask the operator for

1-800-541-2437

1-800-233-7432

1-800-TALK- HIV

1-800-369-2437

Call 711 or 1-800-421-1220

1-800-541-2437

New York State Youth Sexual Health Plan

health.ny.gov/community/youth/development/docs/2014_nys_youth_sexual_health_plan.pdf

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

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.

www.cdc.gov/hiv

Information on STD Testing

health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/std

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

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

www.cdc.gov/std

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

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

www.siecus.com

Cornell University College of Human Ecology

This program has a book called Talking with Kids About HIV/AIDS: A Program for Parents and Older Adults Who Care to help parents, guardians, and other adults talk with children and teens about HIV/AIDS.

www.twkaha.org

Advocates for Youth

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

www.advocatesforyouth.org/parents

Hepatitis C Information

Information about hepatitis C or to find a syringe exchange program or a drugstore that sells syringes without a prescription

www.health.ny.gov

1-800-522-5006

The Alliance of Professional Tattooists (1-816-979-1300)

www.safe-tattoos.com

The Association of Professional Piercers (1-888-888-1APP)

www.safepiercing.org



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