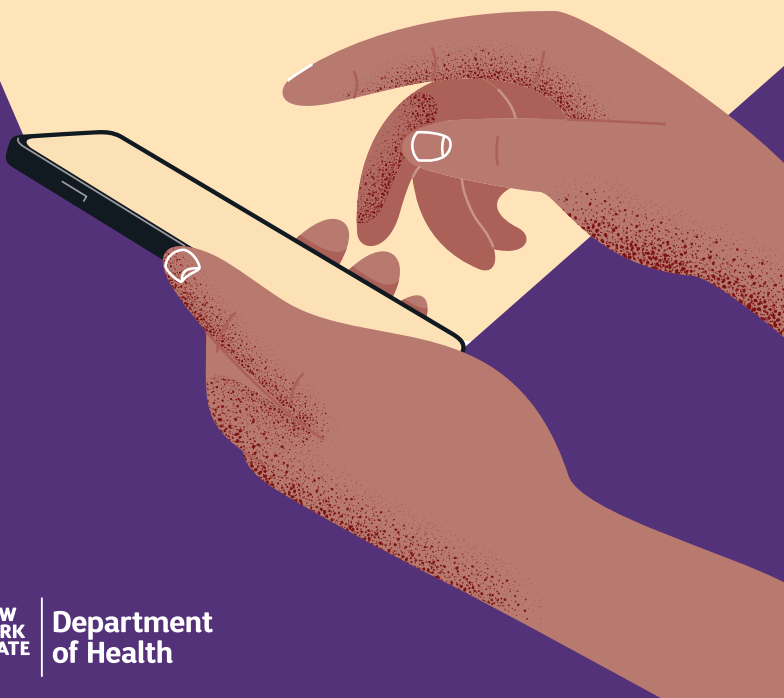


TALKING

with Young People

Why it's important to discuss HIV, STIs,
hepatitis and sexual health



Department
of Health

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Facts about HIV Disease	2
Facts about Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)	4
Facts about Hepatitis C	5
How to Get Started	6
Below Age 9	7
Ages 9-12	8
Ages 13-19	10
Resources	12

INTRODUCTION

Many young people are sexually active

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that 30% of U.S. high school students surveyed in 2021 report they have had sex.

Young people hear about sex and the risks of sexual behavior – HIV, STIs, and unintended pregnancy – from the Internet, social media, and their friends. 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 sooner they will be able to make healthy choices. They need to know the risks that can accompany sexual behaviors and how to protect themselves. 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 answers. The facts in this booklet will also help you learn more.

FACTS ABOUT HIV

What are HIV and AIDS?

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a virus that can cause Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

AIDS 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.

Treatment has few or no side effects. There are different treatment options to find one that best suits their lifestyle.

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.

Whenever possible, the goal is to start treatment the same day a person learns they have HIV, or within 3 days.

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. It means the virus is in check.

Undetectable=Untransmittable, U+U

A person living with HIV has effectively no risk of passing HIV to a partner through sex if:

- They are on HIV treatment, and
- They have undetectable virus for 6 months or longer. Having undetectable virus means the levels of HIV in their blood are so low that the lab test cannot measure them. They are virally suppressed.

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 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 is not transmitted by:

- Casual contact – being near someone who has HIV, or 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. Clean them again just before you reuse them.
- 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 pregnant person to an infant during pregnancy, birth, or through breastfeeding.

All pregnant people should be tested for HIV as early as possible in their pregnancy. Pregnant people living with HIV can take medication for their health and to prevent transmission of HIV to their baby. People living with HIV should avoid breastfeeding.

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 STIs, 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. However, without treatment 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 with someone who has an STI and they don't use a condom. An STI can also be spread if they have condom-free sex and they don't know their partner's STI status.
- Had many sex partners.

Lower the risk of getting an STI:

- Use a male (latex) or female (polyurethane) condom.
- Do not use drugs or alcohol. They can get in the way of good decision-making.
- Have sex with only one partner. Know your partner's STI status.

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

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 someone who is 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 an 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 reexposed to hepatitis C. Check with your health care provider for more information on a cure.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Make this the first 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 to get 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 viewing a story where a person has to decide whether or not to have sex. Or, you may be with your children and hear a story through some form of media about HIV, STIs, and 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

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 hepatitis C are viruses (germs) that cause disease. When these 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 a nurse is okay. Do not trade blood as blood brothers or blood sisters.
- Do not be afraid if you meet someone with HIV or 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

Talking with older children

Children in this age group begin learning more about sex at school, from TV and movies, from the Internet, and from 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 one-on-one. It is helpful to explain this to them so they are prepared for what to expect at their next health care 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-conscious or awkward about their bodies. They may be more curious about sex and want to express their feelings. 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 about HIV, STIs, and hepatitis C. Tell them they can get these infections by having sex and by sharing needles and drug works. Kids this age feel a lot of peer 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

The human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination is available. It can prevent this virus 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 ages 9 to 45.

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

Discuss the basics about getting HIV, STIs, and hepatitis C and how to prevent getting them. Advise them not to use alcohol or other drugs, not to have unprotected sex, and not to 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 can make 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. They may not protect themselves. The only 100% sure way to stay protected from HIV, STIs, and hepatitis C is to not have sex and not share needles.

AGES 13-19

MINOR CONSENT

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

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.

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

- Adolescents this age will likely be meeting with their health care provider one-on-one. Explain that HIV testing should be offered at least once as a part of routine health care for everyone 13 and older, and that 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 to not have any kind of sex, (vaginal, oral, or anal) and to not inject drugs.
- Using condoms. Use a male (latex) or female (polyurethane) 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 they 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 use 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.

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 in this document’s “Resources” section. 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.

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 STI.
- Stick with your choice. If your partner does not want to use a condom, tell them 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 this medicine, you can agree on your own to take it. You have to take the pill once a day, every day, to prevent HIV.
- More teens are using condoms. In 2021, 52% of high school students who were sexually active, used a condom the last time they had sexual intercourse (National Youth Risk Behavior Survey).

For more information about using condoms:

health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/facts/condoms/faqs.htm

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!

RESOURCES

New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute

health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/general/publications/index.htm

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.

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 (SIDA) Hotline (Spanish) 1-800-233-7432
- New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, HIV/AIDS Hotline (Spanish/English) 1-800-TALK-HIV (1-800-825-5448)
- The 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 1-800-369-2437. Call 711 or 1-800-421-1220 and ask for 1-800-541-2437.

New York State Youth Sexual Health Plan

health.ny.gov/community/youth/development

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

cdc.gov/hiv

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.

Information on STI Testing

health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/std

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

cdc.gov/std

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

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

siecus.org

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

Cornell University College of Human Ecology

twkaha.org

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

Advocates for Youth

advocatesforyouth.org

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

Hepatitis C Information

health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/hepatitis/hepatitis_c

1-800-522-5006

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

The Alliance of Professional Tattooists

safe-tattoos.com | 1-816-979-1300

The Association of Professional Piercers

safepiercing.org | 1-888-888-1APP

