



Tips for Parents: AIDS

Parents must understand the fundamentals of HIV/AIDS, recognize what kind of HIV education must be provided by our schools, and play an active role in promoting effective HIV education programs.

What is HIV?

HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus, the virus that causes AIDS. Some people refer to HIV as the “AIDS virus”. “HIV” and “AIDS virus” can be used interchangeably. Although someone can become infected with HIV, a number of years can elapse before that person is classified as having AIDS.

What is AIDS?

AIDS stands for acquired immune deficiency syndrome. In years past, a person who was infected with HIV was said to have AIDS when the person developed certain illnesses or condition. Some experts prefer to decide whether a person has AIDS by studying the person’s blood supply to see how well the immune system is working. Although some people who have AIDS do not die, AIDS is usually fatal.

Will a person infected with HIV get AIDS?

Almost all people who are infected with HIV will ultimately get AIDS. Almost all of the people who get AIDS will ultimately die from illnesses stemming from AIDS (rather than from a non-AIDS condition.) It may take 10 years or more before a person infected with HIV gets AIDS. Medical advances have greatly increased the treatment options for both HIV and AIDS, but millions of people around the world still die each year from AIDS related complications.

Is it easy to become infected with HIV?

HIV is a hard-to-get virus. If people take reasonable precautions, they can easily avoid HIV infection. There are many viruses that are particularly infectious, that is, easy to transmit. HIV isn’t one of them. Even if you hug an HIV-infected person or drink water from the same glass, you’ll not be infected with HIV. HIV is chiefly transmitted by unprotected anal and vaginal sex, exposure to bodily fluids such as blood, urine, semen, and vaginal secretions, and by sharing needles when using IV drugs.

How can people protect themselves?

Anyone that engages in risky behavior can get AIDS. Teenagers, even though they may believe it won’t happen to them, are just as susceptible as everyone else. By abstaining from vaginal and anal intercourse, and needle sharing, you can protect yourself. For those who do not wish to abstain from sexual activity, it is essential to employ protective methods. Proper use of condoms

during sexual activity greatly reduces your risk of infection, but remember, condoms can and do break.

Why are so many students unconcerned about HIV infection?

Most adolescents consider themselves invulnerable, that is, incapable of dying or becoming seriously ill. Because of this imagined invulnerability, many young people simply think that they will not become infected with HIV even though they are engaging in activities that put them at risk of HIV infection. For many youngsters, this is a tragic error.

What do schools need to provide students with to avoid HIV?

To avoid HIV infection, students must:

1. possess a certain degree of knowledge about HIV/AIDS
2. be motivated to avoid HIV infection
3. possess the interpersonal skills (such as the refusal skills needed avoid HIV-risk situations)

Are our schools preparing students to avoid HIV?

To date, many AIDS education programs in schools have focused chiefly on information about HIV and AIDS. Little effort has been devoted to providing students with the interpersonal skills they need to avoid HIV infection or in helping students recognize more accurately their personal vulnerability to HIV infection.

What can parents do to help?

Parents can inform school officials that they want those officials to provide a powerful AIDS education to students. A program of two or three hours per year just isn't potent enough. To alter students' HIV-risk behavior will require a formidable HIV education program. The only way to make sure that schools offer a hard-hitting and effective HIV education program is to have parents demand such programs.

For more information:

“Education And HIV/Aids: A Window of Hope.” World Bank, 2002.

“Young People: Partners in HIV/AIDS Prevention” United Nations Publications, 2004.

“Guidelines for Effective School Health Education to Prevent the Spread of AIDS”

National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

<http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/sexualbehaviors/guidelines/guidelines.htm>