

TEENS AND HIV/AIDS

The number of AIDS cases reported each year among U.S. teenagers (13-19 years of age) has gone up from one case in 1981 to 417 cases in 1994. HIV/AIDS is still the sixth biggest cause of death among 15 to 24 year-olds in the United States.

Many American teenagers are behaving in ways that may put them at risk of getting HIV, other sexually transmitted diseases, or infections associated with drug injection. Studies conducted in high schools indicate that by the 12th grade approximately 75% of high school students have had sexual intercourse; less than 50% report consistent use of latex condoms, and about 20% have had more than four lifetime sex partners. Many students report using alcohol or drugs when they have sex and, in the most recent survey, one in 61 high school students reported having injected an illegal drug.

Among teenagers reported with AIDS, older teens, males, and racial and ethnic minorities are affected more than other groups of people.

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Communications

Information about HIV/AIDS



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What is AIDS?

AIDS stands for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome. AIDS is caused by HIV, the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. HIV impairs your immune system, making it less resistant to diseases and infections. HIV is transmitted through exposure to the bodily fluids of someone infected with HIV. This exposure most commonly occurs during unprotected sex, by sharing needles, through blood transfusions, or by contact with open wounds. Babies born to women with HIV can also become infected.

Alcohol and drugs affect your self-control. Alcohol and illicit drugs lower your inhibitions and impair your judgment. Drinking and drug use can lead to risky behaviors you're less likely to do if sober, including having unprotected sex. This increases your risk for exposure to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

Any drug use increases the risks for HIV/AIDS. Non-injection drugs also contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS when users trade sex for drugs or money or when their judgment and decision-making skills are impaired.

Get the facts. Not having sexual intercourse is the most effective way to avoid STDs, including HIV/AIDS. For those who choose to be sexually active, the following HIV prevention activities can be effective:

- Engaging in sexual activity that does not involve vaginal, anal, or oral sex
- Having intercourse with only one uninfected partner
- Using latex condoms every time you have sex

Stay informed. Even though more effective drugs are now used to treat HIV/AIDS, there is no cure or vaccine.

Know the risks. Even tobacco use impacts HIV/AIDS. Smokers with the HIV virus develop full-blown AIDS twice as quickly as nonsmokers. How can you tell if you or someone else may already have HIV? If you have not shared a needle or had unprotected sex, it is very unlikely that you have HIV. The only way to be certain is to be tested. Most people with HIV do not have any visible symptoms for many years. Once symptoms do begin to show, some of the more common ones include:

- Rapid weight loss
- Profuse night sweats
- Ongoing, unexplained fatigue
- Swollen lymph glands
- Diarrhea that lasts longer than a week
- White spots or blemishes in the mouth or throat
- Pneumonia

Do not assume you are infected if you have any of these symptoms. Each of these symptoms can easily be related to other illnesses. Again, the only way to determine for sure whether you are infected with HIV is to be tested.