

# FACTS *for* FAMILIES

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## Children, Adolescents and HIV/AIDS

Today adolescents of both sexes face a serious risk of HIV infection, which is the cause of AIDS. AIDS is a chronic and often fatal disease. Despite growing understanding and awareness, HIV infection is a serious threat to both heterosexual and homosexual teens. When adolescents take certain risks, they are more likely to become infected with HIV and develop AIDS:

### These are the most important facts about AIDS:

- AIDS is often fatal
- anyone can get AIDS - many teens (both boys and girls) have been infected
- condoms can reduce the risk of getting AIDS
- you can get AIDS from use of even one contaminated needle or one sexual act with a partner who has HIV/AIDS

### Risk of AIDS is increased by:

- an increased number of sexual partners
- IV drug use
- anal intercourse
- any sex (oral, anal or vaginal) without condoms
- alcohol and other drug use (sex is more impulsive and use of condoms less likely if under the influence of alcohol or other drugs)
- tattoos and body piercing with contaminated (unsterile) needles or instruments

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is a chronic illness caused by infection with HIV (human immunodeficiency virus). Millions of Americans are infected with HIV. Some of them have AIDS, but most have no symptoms at all, and many do not know they are infected. Despite significant advances in available medical treatment for HIV, there are no definitive cures or vaccines that can prevent the disease. New treatments have enabled many people with AIDS to live longer, healthier lives. HIV infection and AIDS can be prevented by avoiding risk behaviors.

HIV is transmitted through exchange of certain bodily fluids such as blood, semen, vaginal secretions, and breast milk. To produce an infection, the virus must pass through the skin or mucous membranes into the body.

HIV infection is preventable. Knowledge about HIV is an important aspect of prevention. Parents should educate their children and also work closely with schools, churches, youth

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organizations, and health care professionals to ensure that children and teens receive sex education and preventive drug abuse courses which include material on HIV.

The HIV virus dies quickly when it is outside the human body. It cannot be transmitted by day-to-day or even through close social contacts. Family members of an individual infected with HIV will not catch the virus if they share drinking glasses with the person. There is no known instance in which a child infected with HIV has passed the virus to another child in the course of school activities.

HIV infection occurs in all age groups. Twenty-five percent of the babies born to untreated mothers infected with HIV develop HIV infection themselves. Babies born infected with HIV may die in the first few years or live for many years and will suffer delays in development and many infections. Mothers-to-be with HIV must get special treatment to try to prevent transmission of the virus to their fetuses. New treatments for pregnant women may reduce the transmission of the virus to less than one in ten babies of HIV-positive mothers.

Drug and/or alcohol abuse, premature and/or promiscuous sexual activity are serious risk behaviors. Evaluation by a child and adolescent psychiatrist can be an important first step in helping a family respond effectively to high risk behaviors in their children and adolescents.

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The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) represents over 8,500 child and adolescent psychiatrists who are physicians with at least five years of additional training beyond medical school in general (adult) and child and adolescent psychiatry.

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