

# HIV and Hepatitis:

## How to Have a Conversation with Youth and Young Adults

*A Handbook for Adults Working with Youth & Young Adults, Parents and Caregivers*



CENTERSTONE

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# Talking with Youth & Young Adults about HIV and Hepatitis

HIV is a serious virus that leads to AIDS. Many young people in the United States contract HIV by having sex or using drugs at an early age. Medications are available to help people with HIV live longer, healthier lives; however, there is no cure.

Hepatitis is a severe inflammation of the liver, often caused by a virus that includes hepatitis A (HAV), hepatitis B (HBV), and hepatitis C (HCV), each having different symptoms and treatments. Hepatitis can spread from contaminated food or water (HAV) and blood or bodily fluids (HBV and HCV). Blood tests can determine hepatitis types. While HAV rarely requires treatment, HBV and HCV require antiviral medications, which may vary if the condition is acute or chronic. Vaccines are available for HAV and HBV but not for HCV.

Many young people hear about HIV through the media and school lessons or from their friends. Often, things they “hear” about HIV may not be completely accurate or factual. Hepatitis information is generally lacking, and when provided, knowledge of prevention and treatment is often inadequate or incomplete. Therefore, becoming educated, aware, and equipped with resources is essential when working with youth and young adults in today’s environment, which often includes convincing myths and misinformation.

How to initiate the discussion:

- Be prepared for the conversation by having basic knowledge, facts, and where to get additional information or resources.
- Look for and recognize those “teachable moments” as they are natural opportunities to discuss sensitive subjects.
- Set the stage for the conversation; the environment should be private, quiet, and comfortable, even in a virtual format.
- Deliver information in the context of the individual’s intellectual level and emotional state.
- Use “active listening” by listening to what they are saying; pay attention to what it is they actually want to know.
- Think about how you respond in order to carry the conversation forward and not shut down the discussion.
- Assess for understanding and to ensure content is factual and received. Make sure myths are debunked and addressed with facts.
- It is OK to say “I don’t know” and offer to help find the answer or information.
- Make a plan for prevention, treatment, and appropriate supports.
- Leave them with applicable resources and contacts as needed.

It is important to remember that you do not have to be an HIV or hepatitis expert or have all the answers to individual questions when talking with youth or young adults. The material in this handbook provides you with a starting point, some basic facts, and a list of trustworthy resources for further up-to-date information.

# What is HIV?

- HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus.
- HIV attacks and deteriorates the body's immune system which is the body's natural defense against infections such as the common cold.
- HIV is NOT the same thing as AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), characterized by the collapse of the body's natural immunity against disease. HIV is the virus that causes AIDS.

## How is HIV transmitted?

- Unprotected sexual contact with an infected person (vaginal, anal, and sometimes oral)
- Exposure to infected blood/blood products
  - Infected intravenous needles (drugs, steroids, and sometimes tattoos or body piercing)
  - Blood transfusions (infections from transfusions rarely occur today)
  - Mishandling of infected blood-involved operations
  - Puncture by other HIV contaminated instruments
- Perinatal exposure to baby of infected mother
  - In-utero (and during the birth process)
  - While nursing (less common mode of transmission)
  - Prolonged breastfeeding increases the risk of a woman giving HIV to her baby by about 14 percent.
- HIV uses any one of four types of bodily fluids to travel from Person to Person
  - Blood
  - Semen or pre-seminal fluids
  - Vaginal or rectal secretions
  - Breast milk

## What are the symptoms of HIV?

- Some people who become infected with HIV do not notice any immediate changes in their health.
- Some suffer from a brief flu-like illness within a few weeks of becoming infected, or develop a rash or swollen glands. Symptoms usually disappear within a few days or weeks.

## Who is at risk?

- Anyone under the influence of drugs or alcohol may have impaired judgment, which can lead to unprotected sex.
- Anyone who shares needles with an infected person.
- Anyone who engages in sexual activity with an infected person.

## What are some common myths and misconceptions about HIV?

Myth	Truth
Only people who look sick can spread HIV.	Person who is HIV-positive with no symptoms can still spread HIV.
Only people who have sexual intercourse (vaginal, anal, or oral) with gay/homosexual people get HIV.	Anyone, regardless of gender, sexual orientation or gender identity, can spread HIV through any of the four bodily types of fluids.
Birth control pills protect women from getting HIV.	Birth control pills help to prevent pregnancy but do not protect women from contracting HIV from any of the four types of bodily fluids.
There are no drugs available to treat HIV that can lengthen the life of a person infected with the virus.	The FDA has approved more than two dozen antiretroviral drugs (ART) to treat HIV infection, typically prescribed in a combination or "cocktail" of at least two of them; with ARTs, people can have an undetectable viral load.
There is a cure for HIV and/or AIDS.	There is no cure for HIV.
You must be 18 years of age to get an HIV test without parental consent.	All 50 states and the District of Columbia allow most minors to consent to testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and many explicitly include testing and treatment of HIV. For a state-by-state listing of these consent laws and minors' rights for HIV/STD testing and treatment, please visit: <a href="https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/policies/law/states/minors.html">https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/policies/law/states/minors.html</a>

### HIV in the United States:

- Every year, the average age of HIV-infected people is decreasing.
- In 2019, there were 1,189,700 people known to be living with HIV in the US; many others do NOT know their HIV status.
- In 2019, 36,801 people were newly diagnosed with HIV.
- Approximately 40% newly diagnosed HIV cases are among ages 13-29.

<https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/statistics>

# What is Hepatitis?

- An inflammation of the liver, commonly caused by viral infection, affecting its function.

## What is the difference between the types of hepatitis A, B, and C?

### Hepatitis A (HAV)

- Usually a short-term infection
- Transmitted by food or water contaminated by someone having HAV

### Hepatitis B (HBV)

- Can begin as short-term infections, but in some people, the virus remains in the body and causes chronic (long-term) infection
- Transmitted by contact with infectious blood and body fluids (semen, vaginal secretions)

### Hepatitis C (HCV)

- Can range from a mild illness (acute) lasting a few weeks to a serious, long-term (chronic) illness
- Transmitted by blood-to-blood contact such as:
  - Sharing drug-injection equipment
  - Birth
  - Health care exposures
  - Sex with infected person
  - Unregulated tattoos or body piercings
  - Sharing personal items (e.g., razors, nail clippers, toothbrushes)
- The most common type of Hepatitis in the US; many do NOT know they have HCV
- More than half of the people in the US infected with HCV will develop a chronic infection
- A person can be “co-infected” with both HIV and HCV; people who are co-infected are more likely to get cirrhosis as a result of their chronic HCV infection.

## What is chronic HCV?

- Can be a lifelong infection if left untreated
- Can cause serious health problems, including liver damage, cirrhosis, liver cancer, even death
- The most common reason for liver transplantation in the US

## What are the facts about HCV?

- There are vaccines to prevent HAV and HBV
- There is no vaccine for HCV
- A person infected with HCV can spread it to others, even if they have no symptoms
- After exposure to HCV, it can take 8-11 weeks for an HCV antibody test to be positive. For most people who are infected, the anti-HCV blood test will become positive by six months after exposure.

## People living with HCV should:

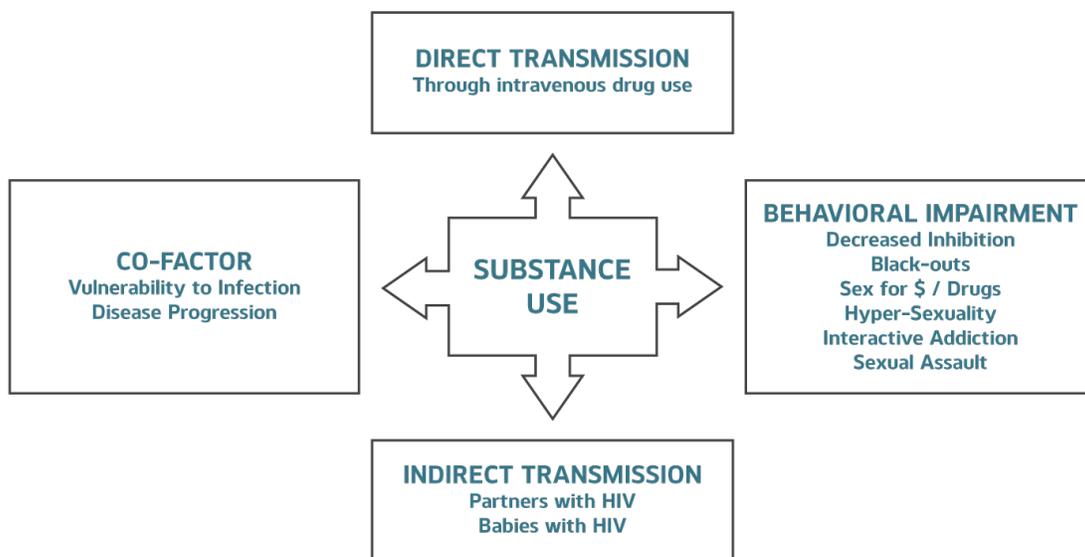
- Be vaccinated against hepatitis A and hepatitis B
- Avoid alcohol because it can cause additional damage to the liver
- Check with their doctor before taking any prescription pills, herbs, supplements, or over-the-counter medications, as these can potentially damage the liver
- Be tested for HIV, because people who have infection are more likely to get cirrhosis

# What is the Link Between HIV and Substance Use/Abuse?

- Alcohol use has been shown to impact HIV infection with increased transmission risk and possible disease progression by blunting one's self-monitoring behavior, thus increasing the likelihood of having multiple or casual sex partners and unprotected sex.
- A history of heavy alcohol use has been correlated with a lifetime tendency toward high-risk sexual behaviors, including multiple sex partners and unprotected sex.
- Drug and alcohol use can increase risk of exposure to HIV by:
  - Obscuring judgment which could cause a person to have unsafe sex
  - Sharing needles for IV use
  - Alcohol can contribute to the spread and progression of the disease

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2728293>

## HIV and substance use:



[http://www.centerforhealthtraining.org/documents/e09\\_HIVTAB%2010.pdf](http://www.centerforhealthtraining.org/documents/e09_HIVTAB%2010.pdf)

## What are risky behaviors?

- Personal and/or group behaviors or activities that may put one's health at risk
- Can be influenced by environment and/or life experience such as poverty, abuse, discrimination, lack of access to services and/or education, etc.

## What are the potential adverse outcomes of engaging in risky behavior?

- Adverse Emotional Outcomes
  - Feelings of regret or guilt
  - Worry about the potential results
  - Lowered self-esteem
  - Depression
  - Emotional withdrawal from relationships
- Adverse Social Outcomes
  - Damage or loss of:
    - Peer relationships
    - Community relationships
      - Church, school, social clubs
      - Legal issues
- Adverse Physical Outcomes
  - Injury to self or others due to intoxication
  - Addiction
  - Unwanted pregnancy
  - Sexually Transmitted Infections
    - HIV, gonorrhea, syphilis, HPV, trichomoniasis, hepatitis, herpes, chlamydia, etc.

## What can you do to combat risks and build protective factors?

- Seek and connect to resources and beneficial services in your geographic area or by virtual access.
- Surround yourself with positive, healthy influences and a supportive network.
- Minimize alcohol/drug misuse and know your limitations to avoid outcomes such as impaired driving, inability to give consent in sexual situations, or disregarding personal boundaries.
- Take preventative action such as using a condom, getting tested, reducing contact with others who engage in high-risk behaviors, decline sharing needles, etc.
- Establish and engage in routine health care and treatment.
- Be a 'buddy' and help someone who is impaired or in a risky situation to mitigate potential negative outcomes that might result.

# How do you Prevent HIV and/or HCV?

- Know your status
- Know your options
- Know your resources and locations for services

## How do I know my status?

Get Tested!

- HIV tests
  - They detect antibodies associated with HIV 90 days after last exposure.
  - HIV Tests can be given orally by swabbing a person's mouth with results typically occurring in about 20 minutes.
  - Regular testing helps to:
    - Reduce stigma of HIV tests
    - Understand the virus better
    - Understand transmission patterns of HIV
    - Inform an infected person to receive treatment sooner
  - The sooner HIV is detected, the better a person's chances for effective treatment.
- Hepatitis tests
  - A blood test can confirm the type of viral hepatitis, the severity of the infection, if an infection is active or dormant, and if a person is currently contagious.
  - Results can take a few days to a few weeks to come back.
  - Rapid HCV tests are available in some health clinics, and the results of these tests are available in 20-30 minutes.

## What are my options?

- Hepatitis vaccinations
  - Currently, there is no vaccine to prevent HCV
  - HBV vaccinations are available and recommended for infants at birth, unvaccinated children and adolescents, and unvaccinated adults who:
    - Have chronic liver problems or need a liver transplant
    - Use intravenous (IV) drugs
    - Live with a person who has hepatitis infection
    - Have had sex with an infected person or multiple partners in the past six months
    - Have a blood clotting disorder, are on dialysis, or are receiving blood transfusions
    - Live in a correctional institution, are in the military, or travel to high-risk areas
    - Work in healthcare or public safety

- Avoid direct exposure to blood or blood products
  - If you are a medical worker or health care provider, avoid coming into direct contact with blood.
- Don't share personal care items
  - Items used on a daily basis will occasionally be exposed to blood (such as toothbrushes, razors, nail and hair clippers, and scissors) and should be kept separate and out of children's reach.
- Choose tattoo and piercing parlors carefully
  - One that is licensed and uses appropriate sanitary procedures such as a disposable needle and ink well for each customer.
- Practice safer sex
  - Particularly if you have HIV, another sexually transmitted disease, multiple sexual partners, or if you engage in rough sex.
  - Use condoms and other prevention methods such as PReP for HIV prevention, internal condoms, dental dams.
- Never share needles or other equipment used with illicit drugs
  - For example, sharing a straw or dollar bill when snorting drugs could transmit HCV as bleeding in the nose frequently happens when taking drugs this way.

# Resources

**centerstone.org/teen** - offers information on various topics such as sex and relationships, drugs and alcohol, body image, cyberbullying, social media safety, depression, suicide, etc.

**cdc.gov** - provides links to general areas of diseases & conditions, healthy living, travel health, etc.

**cdc.gov/std** - provides links to data and statistics, prevention, projects & initiatives, treatment & screening, etc.

**getttested.cdc.gov** - provides links to free, fast, confidential HIV testing locations and answers to commonly asked questions.

**drugabuse.gov** - the National Institutes of Health's National Institute on Drug Abuse site provides links to specific drug topics, research & training, clinical resources & services, etc.

**samhsa.gov** - the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services' (SAMHSA) site provides links to locate treatment, training, data, programs, publications, public messages & news, etc.

**hiv.gov** - provides links to locate testing & treatment, statistics, transmission & symptoms, prevention, etc.

**cdc.gov/hepatitis** - provides links to statistics, policy, and resources for education, prevention, training, etc.

**hhs.gov/hepatitis** - provides links to statistics, general information, locations for testing and treatment in your area, etc.

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