

# HIV AND YOUNG PEOPLE

HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. It is the virus that can lead to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), if not treated. HIV attacks the body's immune system, specifically CD4 cells (aka T cells), which help the immune system fight off infections. When untreated, HIV reduces the number of T cells in the body, making the young person more likely to contract other infections or infection-related cancers.

HIV is found in blood, semen (cum), pre-seminal fluid (pre-cum), vaginal fluid, rectal fluid, and breast milk. Some of the ways HIV is spread includes:

- Anal, oral, or vaginal sex
- Needles, syringes, or other injection equipment
- Pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding

HIV cannot be transmitted by air or water, saliva, sweat, tears, closed-mouth kissing, insects or pets, sharing toilets, food, drinks, or hugging.

## Young People

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) **reports** that in 2017, young people ages 13 to 24 made up 21% (8,164) of the 38,739 new HIV diagnoses in the United States and dependent areas. In addition, young people living with HIV are the least likely of any group to be linked to care in a timely manner and have a suppressed viral load. A suppressed, or undetectable, viral load means that the level of HIV in the blood is too low to be detected by a viral load test.

Rates of HIV are disproportionately higher among LGBTQ young people, especially gay or bisexual men. This does not mean that HIV is a 'gay' or 'LGBTQ' disease. Believing so creates harmful stereotypes about young people living with HIV and LGBTQ young people.

## Treatment

Although no cure currently exists, with proper and consistent medical care, HIV can be controlled. The medicine used to treat HIV is called antiretroviral therapy (ART). ART reduces a young person's viral load (the amount of HIV antibodies) to an undetectable level. Young people living with HIV who maintain an undetectable viral load have effectively no risk of transmitting HIV to their HIV-negative partner through sex.

## Prevention

PrEP stands for Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis. It is an HIV prevention method in which people that are not living with HIV take medicine on a daily basis to reduce their potential exposure to HIV.

PEP stands for post-exposure prophylaxis. It is a way to prevent HIV transmission after a possible recent exposure (sexual assault, a condom breaks or slips off, condomless sex, or needle-sharing for drugs, hormones, or tattoos).

Advocates for Youth believes that:

- Poverty, racism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression all contribute to HIV risk and to quality of treatment and care.
- Young people have the right to education and skills to make informed decisions about their sexual health.
- Young people have the right to condoms, HIV testing, and medication needed to prevent HIV, and have the right to confidential, affordable, accessible services.
- Young people are at risk of not receiving medication regularly enough to have their viral load suppressed. We must ensure that all young people have access to accessible and affordable HIV treatment.
- Young people living with HIV have the right to freedom and dignity. Laws which criminalize people living with HIV are founded in ignorance and serve only to divert attention and resources from real strategies to end the epidemic.

## HIV Resources:

- [advocatesforyouth.org/issue/hiv/](https://advocatesforyouth.org/issue/hiv/)
- [advocatesforyouth.org/nyhaad](https://advocatesforyouth.org/nyhaad)
- [advocatesforyouth.org/mentorship](https://advocatesforyouth.org/mentorship)
- [www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/](https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/)
- [www.WhatWorksInYouthHIV.org/youth-hiv](https://www.WhatWorksInYouthHIV.org/youth-hiv)
- [www.AIDSVu.org](https://www.AIDSVu.org)

### THINGS TO KNOW:

- HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus.
- HIV attacks the body's immune system, specifically CD4 cells (T cells), which help the immune system fight off infections.
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### THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- Only certain body fluids—blood, semen (cum), pre-seminal fluid (pre-cum), rectal fluids, vaginal fluids, and breast milk. HIV cannot be transmitted by air or water, saliva, sweat, tears, closed-mouth kissing, insects or pets, or sharing toilets, food, drinks, or hugging.
- Rates of HIV are disproportionately higher among LGBTQ young people, especially gay or bisexual men. This does not mean that HIV is a 'gay' or 'LGBTQ' disease. Believing so creates harmful stereotypes about young people living with HIV and LGBTQ young people.
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