

Snapshot of the Global HIV Pandemic among Adolescents and Young People

More than thirty years into the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the number of people who are newly infected with HIV is declining in most parts of the world and the total number of AIDS related deaths has been declining over the past decade.^{1,2} Yet HIV/AIDS remains one of the most serious challenges to global public health. Globally, 4 million young people ages 15-24 are living with HIV and 29% are adolescents ages 15-19.³ 1 above Young people ages 15-24 represent 30 percent of new HIV infections (among those 15 and over) with 1,500 young people around the world acquiring HIV every day.⁴ Between 2005 and 2012, adolescents ages 10-19 were the only age group for which AIDS-related deaths did not decline.⁵

Despite important gains in preventing new HIV infections, sub-Saharan Africa remains the hardest hit region where 80 percent of all young women and girls ages 15-24 living with HIV reside. Young women and girls of this age are also twice as likely to be living with HIV as their male counterparts. In some regions other populations most at risk, which include young people, are people who inject drugs, commercial sex workers and their clients, gay men, men who have sex with men, and transgender people.⁶ Young people around the world must be provided with the information and tools they need to protect themselves from HIV and to live positively for those who have already acquired HIV – including comprehensive sexuality education, HIV counseling, testing and treatment, and youth-friendly, affordable health care.

DESPITE DECLINES IN NEW HIV INFECTIONS IN MANY COUNTRIES, MILLIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE ARE LIVING WITH HIV AROUND THE WORLD

- Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 71 percent of the global total of people living with HIV. Within the region, ten countries are home to 81 percent of people living with HIV, half of which are in Nigeria and South Africa. In the region, there are 2.9 million young people ages 15-24 living with HIV. New HIV infections among young people ages 15-24

have declined by 42 percent since 2001 and by 17 percent since 2010.⁷ In spite of this, 1 of every 6 deaths among adolescents in Africa is due to HIV.⁸

- Second to sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Pacific is the region with the second largest number of people living with HIV, with India accounting for 43 percent. Less than .1 percent of young women and young men ages 15-24 are living with HIV, respectively. Despite varying declines in new HIV infections among most countries in the region between 2005 and 2013, new HIV infections increased in Indonesia by 48 percent.⁹
- The Caribbean region is home to only 0.7 percent of the global total of people living with HIV yet infection rates remain high. In the region, .5 percent and .4 percent of young women and men ages 15-24 are living with HIV, respectively.¹⁰
- In Latin America, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela are home to 75 percent of people living with HIV. There has been a slow, 3 percent decline in new HIV infections in the region between 2005 and 2013. At least one third of new HIV infections occur among young people ages 15-24 years. Approximately .1 percent of young women and .3 percent of young men ages 15-24 are living with HIV.¹¹
- While the Middle East and North Africa is the region with the lowest number of people living with HIV, new HIV infections are on the rise in several countries. Algeria, Islamic Republic of Iran, Morocco, Somalia and the Sudan account for 88 percent of people living with HIV. Less than .1 percent of young women and young men ages 15-24 are living with HIV, respectively.¹²
- Eastern Europe and Central Asia accounts for 3 percent of the global number of people living with HIV. Approximately .2 percent of young women and .2 percent of young men ages 15-24 are living with HIV. Unlike other regions where new HIV infections are declining, they are on the rise in this

THE FACTS

“Many young people do not have access to sexual health advice, condoms and other forms of contraception, or HIV counseling and testing services.”

region, where the Russian Federation and the Ukraine account for over 85 percent of people living with HIV.¹³

- In Western and Central Europe and North America, the United States is home to 56 percent of people living with HIV. Less than .1 percent of young women and young men ages 15-24 are living with HIV, respectively.¹⁴

ADOLESCENTS ARE AT RISK OF HIV AND AIDS-RELATED DEATHS

- In 2013, nearly half of all adolescents living with HIV globally were in six countries: South Africa, Nigeria, United Republic of Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia, and India.¹⁵
- In 2013, there were approximately 250,000 new HIV infections among adolescents ages 10-19, two thirds of which were among adolescent girls.¹⁶
- In 2013, an adolescent between the ages of 15 and 19 was newly infected with HIV every two minutes.¹⁷
- Between 2005 and 2012, AIDS related deaths among adolescents increased by 50 percent where they declined by 32 percent for all other age groups.¹⁸
- AIDS is now the leading cause of death among adolescents in Africa and the second most common cause of death among adolescents globally.
- Since 2000, the estimated numbers and rates of death related to HIV among African adolescents have increased more in males than females.¹⁹

YOUNG WOMEN AND ADOLESCENT GIRLS ARE PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TO HIV

- Every year, there are about 380,000 new HIV infections among adolescent girls and young women ages 15-24 globally.

- In some regions over the past 30 years, young women and adolescent girls have remained at a much higher risk of HIV infection than their male counterparts. As a result, young women and adolescent girls account for a disproportionate number of the new infections among young people and the number of young people living with HIV.²⁰
- In 2013, almost 60% of all new HIV infections among young people ages 15-24 were among adolescent girls and young women.²¹
- Sub-Saharan Africa is home to 80 percent of young women ages 15-24 living with HIV.²²
- In Mozambique, adolescent girls had an HIV prevalence rate of 7 percent, which more than doubled to 15 percent by the time they were 25 years old. This pattern of high HIV prevalence in adolescence followed by even higher prevalence as girls reach their early 20s is repeated in almost every country in East and Southern Africa.²³
- In Haiti, which accounts for 55 percent of all people living with HIV in the Caribbean, HIV prevalence among young women ages 15-19 is more than double that of young men of the same age and women ages 20-24 are three times more likely to be HIV-positive than their male counterparts.²⁴

YOUNG PEOPLE WITHIN KEY AFFECTED POPULATIONS, INCLUDING MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN, TRANSGENDER WOMEN, COMMERCIAL SEX WORKERS, AND INJECTING DRUG USERS ARE AT HIGHER RISK OF HIV

- In countries where the HIV epidemic is higher among gay men and other men who have sex with men than among the general population, they often acquire HIV while under the age of 25. HIV prevalence is approximately 4.2 percent for young gay men and other men who have sex with men compared to 3.7 percent for older men.²⁵
- In the United States, the key populations most at risk for HIV are young African American gay men and other men who have sex with men. Young African American men who had sex with men ages 13-24 years experienced the highest rates of new HIV infections in 2010.²⁶
- Among young people under 25 years of age old who inject drugs, HIV prevalence is approximately 5.2 percent.²⁷
- In the Ukraine, HIV prevalence is 6.4 percent among young people under the age of 25 who inject drugs.²⁸

- Transgender women are among the populations most heavily affected by HIV and evidence suggests that, in some settings, a significant proportion of young transgender women engage in selling sex.²⁹
- Transgender women who engage in sex work are at an increased risk of HIV infection. Country data suggests that HIV prevalence for transgender sex workers is nine times higher than for other sex workers.³⁰

LACK OF INFORMATION, RESOURCES, AND ACCESS TO SERVICES FOR YOUTH FUEL THE EPIDEMIC

- Many young people do not have access to sexual health advice, condoms and other forms of contraception, or HIV counseling and testing services. Reproductive health services are seldom geared towards the needs of young people, who therefore tend to avoid them—putting themselves and their sexual partners at risk of HIV infection.³¹
- In sub-Saharan Africa, 26 percent of adolescent girls possess comprehensive and correct knowledge about HIV, compared with 36 percent of adolescent boys and 10 percent of young men and 15 percent of young women ages 15–24 are aware of their HIV status.³²
- On average in the Caribbean, one out of every three young people aged 15–24 are inadequately informed or unaware of the ways to prevent HIV.³³
- In sub-Saharan Africa, only eight male condoms were available per year for each sexually active individual. Among young people, condom access was even less.³⁴
- In Asia and the Pacific region, only 10 countries are known to have laws and policies that support independent consent for young people to access HIV testing and related services whereas all others have no such provisions, have confusing laws and policies or an absence of any information.³⁵
- Children and adolescents living with HIV who are under 15 years of age are less likely to receive treatment than adults. In 2013, less than one in four children ages 0 to 14 accessed antiretroviral therapy.³⁶
- Stigma and discrimination in the health system alongside lack of knowledge of the health needs of transgender people deter use of services. In the United States, a study showed that transgender women who had negative or transphobic experiences

in the health-care system were reluctant to get tested in the future for fear that a diagnosis would require seeing a health-care provider.³⁷

TRADITIONAL HARMFUL PRACTICES AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE CONTRIBUTE TO INCREASED RISK OF HIV AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

- The common practice of child marriage is an important factor in the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Growing evidence from sub-Saharan Africa shows that married girls in the region are at greater risk of HIV infection than sexually active, unmarried girls.³⁸ For example, a study in Uganda showed that HIV prevalence for girls ages 15-19 was 89 percent compared to 66 percent among single girls.³⁹
- In some settings, schools are not prepared to guarantee a safe and productive learning environment for adolescent girls and young women. A study in South Africa found that 30 percent of young female rape survivors were assaulted in or around their school.⁴⁰
- As many as 45 percent of adolescent girls in some settings report that their first sexual experience was forced. Studies demonstrate that partner violence increases the risk for HIV. In South Africa, a study found that young women who experienced intimate partner violence were 50 percent more likely to have acquired HIV than women who had not experienced violence.⁴¹
- In El Salvador, Kyrgyzstan and South Africa, there have been reports of rapes, family violence and murder among lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women due to widely held myths, such as the belief that women who are raped by a man will change their sexual orientation (so-called corrective rape).⁴²

Research around the world has found that comprehensive school and community-based HIV prevention programs, which include information about abstinence, condoms, as monogamy/partner reduction, help reduce HIV rates and improve risk behaviors among young people.^{55, 56}

WHAT IMPACT DOES MALE CIRCUMCISION HAVE ON HIV TRANSMISSION?

Research has shown that men who are circumcised are up to 73 percent less likely to acquire HIV through heterosexual transmission than men who are not; circumcision maintained its effectiveness five years after the initial study.^{51, 52, 53}

WHAT ABOUT EARLY TREATMENT?

In 2011, a National Institute of Health-funded study found that treating HIV-positive people immediately after they were found to be HIV positive, vs. waiting until their viral load dropped to a certain point, reduced transmission by 96 percent.⁵⁴

PROGRAMS AROUND THE WORLD ARE IMPROVING HIV KNOWLEDGE ENCOURAGING BEHAVIOR CHANGE AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

- In Vietnam, project focused on decreasing the number of young people becoming infected with HIV included conducting a needs assessment among Vietnamese youth, developing advocacy materials for stakeholder support and forums for policy makers, supporting youth advisory groups and study tours, implementing a mass media program focused on behavior change using television and radio, and providing community based HIV/AIDS prevention resources for youth with harm reduction outreach services, HIV prevention for vulnerable youth, and primary prevention for youth and families. The project contributed to decreasing HIV prevalence and incidence in selected provinces in Viet Nam, increasing HIV/AIDS awareness and knowledge, and decreasing high-risk behaviors.⁴³
- In Ethiopia, a program for adolescent girls ages 10-19 engaged older female mentors to teach a curriculum integrating life skills and knowledge of HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence in dedicated community centers and safe spaces.⁴⁴ Results of a quasi-experimental study of this program found that girls in the intervention sites were twice as likely as girls not in the

sites to score highly on HIV knowledge questions, to know where to obtain voluntary counseling and testing, and to want to be tested.⁴⁵

- In Malawi, a randomized control trial with more than 1,200 never-married, in-school and out-of-school adolescent girls and young women ages 13-22 studied the effects of making cash transfers to school girls and their parents conditional on school attendance. There was no reduction in HIV prevalence among girls who left school compared with a 64 percent odds reduction in HIV prevalence among those who stayed in school and received a cash transfer.⁴⁶
- In Colombia, a national sexuality education program lead by the Ministry of Education that builds on gender equality, citizenship and human rights, and community participation shows that students' knowledge of sexual and reproductive health and rights, has improved. Students with the highest levels of knowledge reported feeling that their classrooms were safe spaces where they could count on being treated fairly and with respect, particularly in communities where there was an absence of armed conflict. Teacher training was also found to be important with higher levels of knowledge found among students with teachers trained in citizenship and human rights.⁴⁷

WHY ARE AIDS-RELATED DEATHS INCREASING AMONG ADOLESCENTS?

- *AIDS-related deaths among adolescents today reflect HIV infections among children from at least a decade ago.*
- *Many of these children slipped out of care and treatment programs, were lost to follow-up, or were never even diagnosed.*
- *The majority of the approximately 2.1 million adolescents living with HIV in 2013 acquired HIV through mother-to-child transmission and many do not know their status.*
- *Without knowing that they are HIV positive, they enter early adolescence with limited opportunities for early detection or referral to treatment programs.*⁴⁸

WHY DO MORE YOUNG WOMEN AROUND THE WORLD HAVE HIV THAN YOUNG MEN?¹

- *They are biologically more susceptible to HIV.*
- *Gender inequalities in many countries prevent young women from negotiating safer sexual practices including condom use.*
- *Young women may have older male partners who are more likely to have HIV.*
- *Gender-based violence and limited access to healthcare and education, coupled with systems and policies that do not address the needs of young people, are obstacles that block adolescent girls and young women from being able to protect themselves against HIV, particularly as they transition into adulthood.*⁴⁹

IN SEVERAL COUNTRIES, WHY DO YOUNG GAY MEN AND OTHER MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN HAVE HIGHER HIV PREVALENCE RATES?

- Stigma, discrimination as well as punitive social and legal environments based on sexual orientation and gender identity contribute to their increased vulnerability to HIV.
- This vulnerability is further magnified by limited availability of and access to sexual and reproductive health services for young people.⁵⁰

EMPOWERING A GENERATION TO END HIV

- Adolescents and young people around the world are at risk for HIV, and millions face serious barriers to prevention and access to services. Yet rates have fallen by over 25 percent among young people in 16 of the world's 21 worst affected countries. In most of these, young people have reduced numbers of partners, increased condom use, and are waiting longer to

have sex.³ Young people have shown that given the tools, including youth friendly services, complete information about HIV, and access to contraception, condoms, and HIV counseling and testing, they can protect themselves. A combination of approaches, and the removal of societal barriers to prevention, can give this generation the power to end HIV.

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