

# Fundamentals of Teaching HIV

## CORE CONCEPT

HIV is preventable and, for the most part, a chronic manageable disease.

### RATIONALE

*How do we teach, and why do we teach that way?*

- Caring for your sexual health includes understanding how to prevent, test, and get treatment for HIV.
- Reducing shame and stigma should be a primary focus of HIV education. This includes the careful use of language. For instance, using HIV instead of AIDS and “sex with a condom” instead of ‘safer sex.’
- HIV education should address causes and impacts of disparities.
- It is important to treat everyone with respect, including people living with HIV and those who may be at risk for contracting HIV.

### TALKING POINTS

*What do we say?*

- HIV can be prevented by: (1) Avoiding fluid-to-blood or fluid-to-mucus membrane contact, (2) not sharing needles, (3) choosing sex behaviors that carry less risk of HIV transmission, (4) using condoms during penetrative sex with a penis or shared sex toy, (5) PrEP, a pill taken daily for HIV prevention, or (6) PEP, a medication taken after exposure to HIV to prevent infection.<sup>i</sup>
- The only way to know if you have HIV is to get tested.
- Condoms and PrEP are both highly effective at preventing sexual transmission of HIV.
- When a person with HIV has an undetectable viral load, they will not transmit HIV to sexual partners. This is called treatment-as-prevention, Undetectable = Untransmittable, or U=U.<sup>ii</sup>
- While anyone can contract HIV, there are larger disparities within the epidemic for people of color, men who have sex with men, and transgender women due to racism, lack of access to care and other forms of oppression. Individual behavior choices are not the main cause. For example, black men who have sex with men are more likely to use condoms than their white counterparts, yet still experience higher rates of HIV infection.<sup>iii</sup>

## KNOW THE FACTS

**FACT:** HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. HIV is a virus that attacks the body’s immune system, making it harder for the body to fight off infection.

**FACT:** People contract HIV from someone else who has it, usually through having sex or sharing needles. HIV can be transmitted through blood, semen, pre-ejaculatory fluid, rectal fluids, vaginal fluids, or breast milk.

**FACT:** During insertive sex with a penis, the receptive partner has a much higher risk of contracting HIV than the insertive partner. Receptive anal sex carries the highest risk for sexual transmission of HIV.

**FACT:** There is little to no risk of transmission of HIV through oral sex.<sup>iv</sup>

## COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT HIV

### What is the difference between HIV and AIDS?

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome and is a term used to describe the illnesses and symptoms that happen in late stage HIV disease. Instead of using the term “AIDS,” medical and advocacy workers now generally refer to “HIV” or “HIV disease.”

### Why can’t we just put everyone with AIDS on an island?

This is a pretty common question. The idea of isolating sick people has come up multiple times throughout history. There are two parts to the answer, a factual one and an ethical one. Practically speaking, it just wouldn’t work. Like with any STI, many folks who have HIV do not know they have it, so it would be virtually impossible. Two, rounding up and imprisoning people based on a medical condition is morally wrong. When we talk about people with HIV, we’re talking about people’s moms, brothers, grandmas, friends, cousins. People with HIV are individuals deserving of freedom, support, and love just like everyone else.



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<sup>i</sup> “The Basics of HIV Prevention.” *AIDS info*, 2019, <https://aidsinfo.nih.gov/understanding-hiv-aids/fact-sheets/20/48/the-basics-of-hiv-prevention>.

<sup>ii</sup> “Undetectable = Untransmittable: Public Health and HIV Viral Load Suppression.” *UNAIDS*, 2018,

<https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2018/july/undetectable-untransmittable>.

<sup>iii</sup> “HIV Stigma and Discrimination.” *Avert*, 2018, <https://www.avert.org/professionals/hiv-social-issues/stigma-discrimination>.

<sup>iv</sup> “Oral Sex and HIV Risk.” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/risk/oralsex.html>.