

HIV Edmonton
TALKING to KIDS about HIV/AIDS



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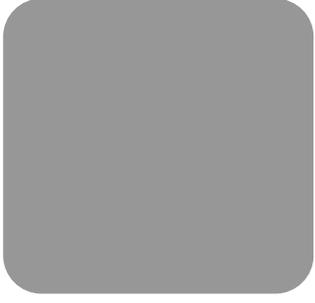
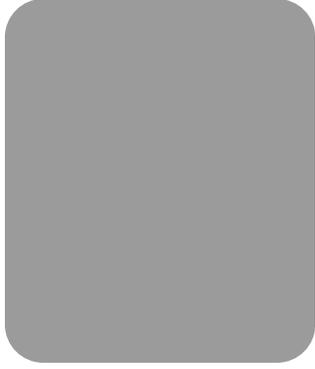
Why this booklet?

This booklet has been written to help parents and other significant adults talk to kids **about HIV/AIDS**. It provides the basic facts about HIV and AIDS, and it contains suggestions on how to discuss these facts with kids.

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**TALKING
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Why talk about HIV/AIDS?

Kids need to know about HIV/AIDS for many reasons. HIV/AIDS is a serious disease that is spreading rapidly throughout the world. Most young people have already heard about HIV or AIDS from the media, adult conversations or their peers. Knowledgeable parents, teachers, public health workers and other trusted adults who have access to credible, age-appropriate learning materials will be able to help young people acquire a better understanding of HIV/AIDS and of people living with HIV/AIDS. This understanding can help kids develop the skills they need to make healthy decisions, know what healthy (and unhealthy) relationships are, and get them involved in addressing the stigma and discrimination that surrounds HIV/AIDS.

As the rate of HIV rises, it is increasingly likely that young people will know someone who has the virus. Information will help them respond with respect and compassion to people with HIV/AIDS. They will be less likely to criticize or tell cruel jokes, or to perpetuate the stigma that people living with HIV/AIDS face on a daily basis.

Here are a few other reasons for talking to children and youth about HIV/AIDS:

- Some young people believe myths about HIV/AIDS that need to be dispelled.
- Many kids have fears about diseases, and need to be given information for reassurance.
- Children and youth have natural curiosity and may ask questions that you need to be prepared to answer.
- Research shows that youth who understand the facts and risks associated with sex will delay their first sexual experience, thus reducing the risks associated with early sexual behaviour.
- Positive discussions with trusted adults will help kids have more healthy attitudes about relationships, love, and sex.
- By giving them the information they need to make safer and healthier choices, you can encourage kids who are already sexually active to use safer sex practices.
- Young people need information in order to understand and reduce the risks associated with injection drug use.

Talking about HIV and AIDS with kids may not be easy but, whether their present risk of infection seems slight or significant, they need to be informed. HIV/AIDS affects us all. By providing accurate information, you can address questions and curiosity, reduce fears, avoid the possibilities of their getting the wrong information from less reliable sources, and help the children and youth you care about make healthier choices.

Talking can be difficult...

Talking about HIV/AIDS often means talking about topics related to sex and drug use, topics that are not easy for some people. But, when you talk to kids about sensitive matters, you are showing them that you care about their health and happiness.

Some people worry that discussing sex with children and youth will encourage them to become sexually active. Remember, research shows that children who are well informed and comfortable in talking about sexuality are less likely to have sexual intercourse in their adolescence.

There are things you can do to make sensitive conversations with kids more comfortable.

- Talk at their level, using age-appropriate language and ideas to make sure they understand.
- Ask for opinions, not personal information – there is a difference.
- Be willing to answer questions yourself, and always be honest. Talking is a two-way street.
- Listen carefully. Take their responses and questions seriously, and let their questions guide your conversation.
- Don't feel that you have to have all the answers; just let them know you'll find out, or offer to find the answer with them.
- Don't think that you have to cover all topics in one conversation; "little talks" more often are better than one "big talk".
- Do not assume your opinion is the only valid one. Be mature enough to accept that a child or youth may have different ideas than you.
- Don't be afraid to admit that you are embarrassed, but be sure to tell your child you want to talk anyway.
- Focus on providing factual information – kids respond well to information that is prove-able, and that is free from judgements.
- Once you have talked, let them know you're always available if they want to talk more, or have more questions.
- Let them know where they can get more information and give them some guidance about assessing what sources of information are reliable.

Most importantly, learn as much as you can before talking with children or youth. It's important to separate fact from fiction before talking about HIV/AIDS. This guide can be a useful starting tool, and there are many other resources listed at the end that will help you learn more about HIV/AIDS.

Starting a conversation...

One of the biggest mistakes adults make in terms of talking to kids about topics related to sexual health is waiting for the kids to ask questions. Most children won't ask questions about things that they think adults are uncomfortable talking about, and the opportunity will be missed if adults don't take the lead.

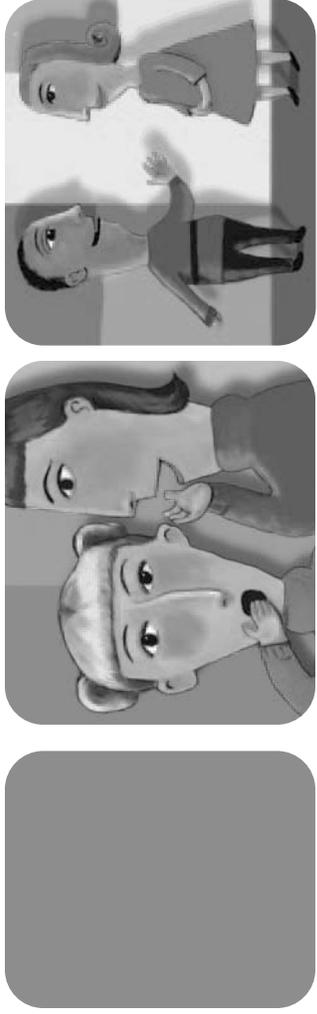
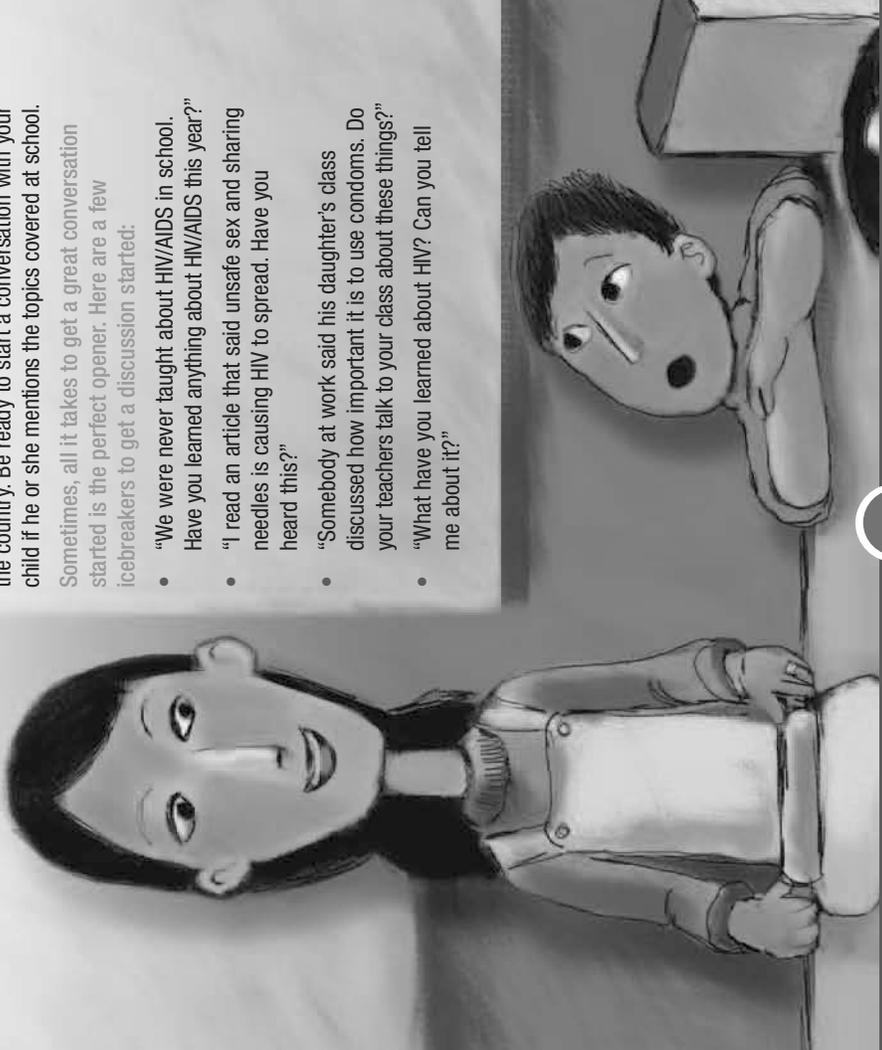
Depending on your relationship with the child or youth, you may find it easier to talk about HIV/AIDS than other adults may. If you have a hard time bringing up the subject, or don't get much of a response once you have, there are different ways to go about starting a conversation.

First, it's important to set the tone, so that both you and the child will be comfortable and have plenty of time to talk. Here are some suggestions:

- Choose a time when you're both relaxed, and there are no distractions.
- Don't corner the child, such as in a car. Instead, bring up the subject when you are doing some activity together, such as making a meal or doing the dishes.
- Post a newspaper clipping about HIV/AIDS on the fridge and then start a conversation about it.
- Introduce the topic. Kids may not want to start a conversation right away, but they will know that you are available when they're ready. Sexual health is taught in many schools across the country. Be ready to start a conversation with your child if he or she mentions the topics covered at school.

Sometimes, all it takes to get a great conversation started is the perfect opener. Here are a few icebreakers to get a discussion started:

- "We were never taught about HIV/AIDS in school. Have you learned anything about HIV/AIDS this year?"
- "I read an article that said unsafe sex and sharing needles is causing HIV to spread. Have you heard this?"
- "Somebody at work said his daughter's class discussed how important it is to use condoms. Do your teachers talk to your class about these things?"
- "What have you learned about HIV? Can you tell me about it?"



Stopping a conversation...

Sometimes, the way we say things or ask questions can encourage kids to talk. These statements are "door openers":

- "What do you think?"
- "That's a good question."
- "I don't know, but I'll find out."
- "Do you know what that word means?"
- "I'm glad you told me about that."

Other times, we may stop a conversation by saying things that discourage discussion. The following statements are "door closers":

- "You're too young."
- "Where did you hear that?"
- "I don't care what your friends are doing..."
- "That's not your business."
- "We can talk about that when you need to know."

WHAT SHOULD YOU TELL THEM, AND WHEN?



Every child and youth is different. As the adult, it is up to you to gauge what facts kids will be able to understand about HIV/AIDS, and what kind of information they need to know. And, kids will usually take what they need from what you are telling them, and discard what is not relevant to them at the time. So it's important to remember that a bunch of "little talks" will be more effective than just one "big talk." It's also important to remember that kids of all ages can benefit from conversations about healthy relationships and the importance of self-respect.

The following information is meant as a guideline of what to tell kids, and when.

Pre-schoolers (ages 3-4)

Some children at this stage can understand much more than we think they can. This is a good time to establish good lines of communication. You can tell children things like what sex is, introduce names for body parts, and answer questions about the differences between boys and girls. In terms of HIV/AIDS information, most pre-schoolers are too young for in-depth discussions about viruses and disease, but you can encourage them to ask questions if they heard something from friends, or on TV.

Young children (ages 5-9)

Children at this stage are starting to understand more about the world and their place in it, and may have questions or fears about illnesses and diseases. They may have heard about HIV/AIDS, but may not understand what it is and how it's transmitted. Explain it to them in simple terms, and don't get too technical. You can explain what the acronyms "HIV" and "AIDS" mean. And you may want to tell them that HIV is a germ in some people's blood that can make them sick over time. Let them know that it's not like a cold, though – they will need to understand that HIV is not that easy to catch.

Pre-teens (ages 10-12)

Pre-teens are becoming more concerned about their bodies and their looks. At this age, they can understand the idea of cause and effect. They may not talk as openly about their concerns with you, but it's important to be available to talk, no matter what the subject. You should talk to them about sexuality, sexual orientation, sexual activities, how HIV is spread, and how they can protect themselves from HIV as well as other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). They need information about alcohol and drug use too, so that they can make healthy decisions.

Early teens (ages 13-15)

Around this age, kids might be resistant to talking about personal subjects. Do not avoid talking with early teens about sex, drugs and HIV/AIDS risks, because sexual activity at this age is not uncommon, if you've already talked about it in the past, bring it up again to make sure they remember the details and understand the realities of risky behaviours. Let them know you want to talk with them because you want them to be safe, not because you want to pry into their personal lives. It may also be a good idea to have a family doctor talk to teens about sexual health. This would be a good age to discuss how to tell the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships, and talk about peer pressure and the importance of being in control of the decisions they make about their own bodies.

Late teens (ages 16-19)

At this stage, the pressure to be sexually active is strong. Many youth believe that they cannot be infected by HIV or other STIs, but adults need to let teens know about the realities of risky behaviours such as unprotected sex and sharing needles. Try not to judge their beliefs or attitudes on these topics but let them know that you only want what's best for them, and let them know you are always available to talk. If your teen hasn't spoken to a doctor or health care professional about sexual health by this point, be sure to encourage them to make an appointment to do so.

When it comes to teens, adults need to remember that they may have different views about sexual activity, and may engage in sex before you think they are ready. For this reason, they need to know about condoms, birth control, and alternative forms of sexual activity such as kissing, masturbation and other sexual activities that do not include penetration. Teens need to know about how drugs and alcohol can affect their judgement, and they need to know about the high risk of sharing needles to inject drugs (including steroids) and to do piercings or tattooing.



Answering questions.

There are a lot of reasons why children will ask questions about HIV/AIDS. In all cases, it's important to listen to their question carefully, give a simple and direct answer, and check to make sure they understand what you've said. Adults can generally expect four different types of questions:

1 General curiosity and seeking information.

These questions are fairly simple and usually result from a natural curiosity. For example, "What is HIV?", "How do people get AIDS?", and "Why do people die from AIDS?"

2 Concern for their well-being.

Youth children may be frightened by the things they hear about HIV/AIDS on TV or from other people. An example might be, "Can children get AIDS?" Describe to your child how the disease is spread, as well as how it can be prevented.

3 Concern for their parents, family and friends.

A child's world is very small, starting with their immediate family, and then extending to friends and their larger family, such as cousins, aunts and uncles. They want to be reassured that the people who are important to them are safe, and will always be safe.

4 For reaction's sake.

Although most kids seldom ask questions about things that they think adults are uncomfortable talking about, some youth may ask questions or give opinions just to see how those around them react. They may question your past behaviour, use words they know will elicit a response, or label people. The key is not to react in a negative manner, but to be open and honest, and to give them the information they need.



BASIC FACTS ABOUT HIV/AIDS



The following information is some basic facts about HIV transmission and prevention. Not all of the information is appropriate for all ages, but this will give you a good understanding about HIV/AIDS to get conversations started.

THE BASICS

HIV is the Human Immunodeficiency Virus that causes AIDS, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

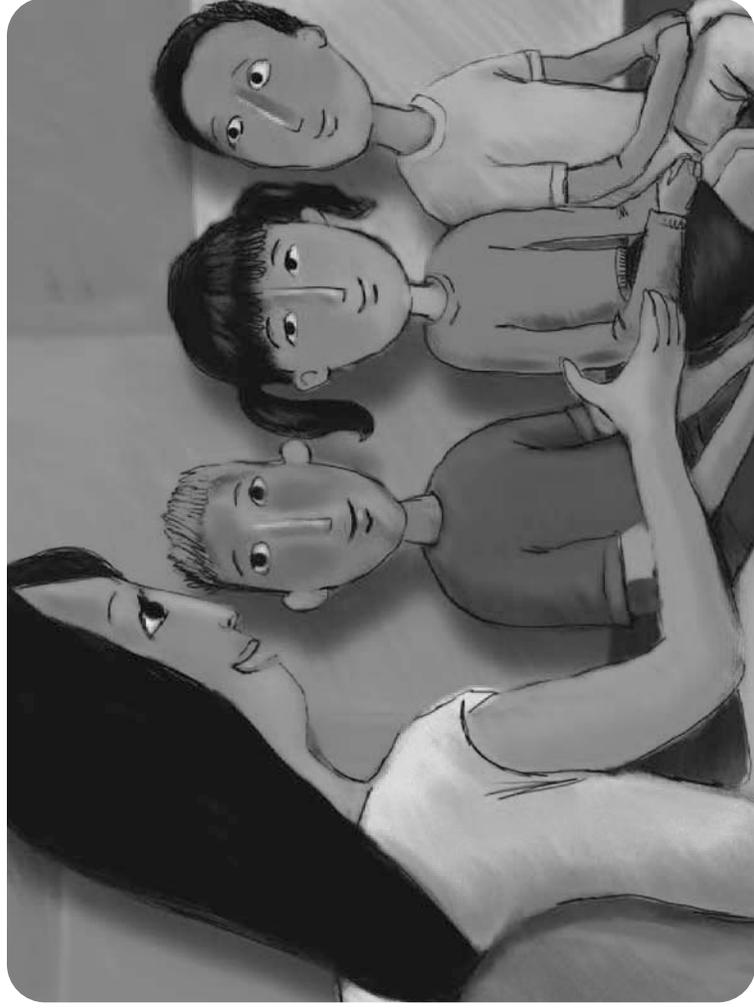
HIV is a virus that attacks your immune system. Once the virus gets inside your body:

- you may not feel or look sick for years, but you can still infect others
 - over time, your immune system grows weak and you can become sick with different illnesses
 - if left untreated, your immune system will no longer be able to defend your body from infections, diseases or cancers which can kill you. Once this happens, you have AIDS.
- Anyone can be infected with HIV no matter what age, sex, sexual orientation, race or ethnic origin. **It's not who you are that puts you at risk for HIV infection. It's what you do.**

There is **NO CURE** for HIV or AIDS. There are some drugs that can slow down the disease so that you stay healthier for a longer time. But these drugs cannot get rid of HIV or cure AIDS. **Prevention is the only defense.**

You can get HIV if the blood, semen, or vaginal fluid of an infected person gets into your bloodstream through a break, cut or tear in your skin. The virus can get into your bloodstream if you:

- have vaginal or anal sex with someone who has HIV without using a condom
- have oral sex with someone who has HIV without using a condom or a dental dam (A dental dam is a square piece of latex used to cover the anus or vagina.)
- share sex toys with someone who has HIV without washing them properly before sharing, or without using a new condom on them for each user
- take part in any other activities that include contact with infected blood, semen, or vaginal fluid.



You can also get HIV if you:

- share needles or other equipment (water, cooker, filter, etc.) to inject drugs like cocaine, heroin or steroids with someone who has HIV
- share needles or ink to get a tattoo
- share needles or jewelry to get a body piercing
- share acupuncture needles.

A woman with HIV can pass the virus to her baby:

- during pregnancy, in the uterus
- during birth
- through breastfeeding.

Since November 1985, all blood and blood products in Canada are checked for HIV. Your risk of getting infected from a blood transfusion is extremely low.

You can't get HIV from...

- talking, shaking hands, working or eating with someone
- hugs or kisses
- coughs or sneezes

- donating blood
- swimming pools
- toilet seats or water fountains
- bed sheets or towels
- forks, spoons, cups, food
- insects or animals.

You can still have sex with little or no risk of getting HIV. This is called "safer sex". Having safer sex means making sure that the other person's blood, semen, or vaginal fluid does not get into your bloodstream.

PREVENTING HIV INFECTION

How can I practise safer sex?

- Use a latex or polyurethane condom or female condom correctly, every time you have vaginal or anal sex.
- Use a condom or dental dam correctly every time you have oral sex.
- Use only water-based lubricants with latex condoms. (Oil-based lubricants like Vaseline can weaken a latex condom and make it break.)
- Choose non-penetrative forms of sexual stimulation, like masturbation, sensual massage, phone sex or cybersex.

How can I practise "safer injecting"?

Quitting drugs is not possible for everyone. If you inject drugs like cocaine, heroin, or steroids, you can still reduce the risk of getting HIV by practising "safer injecting".

- Use a new needle and new supplies (water, cooker, filter, etc.) every time you inject.
- Never share needles or supplies with anyone else.

How can I tell if I'm infected?

The only way to know for sure if you are infected is by getting tested. If you think that you have been infected with HIV, keep in mind that:

- If you get infected with HIV, your body will make antibodies to fight it.
- The HIV test (a simple blood test) looks for these antibodies.
- It can take 8 to 14 weeks (about three months) after you get infected for your body to produce enough antibodies to show up in the blood test.
- A few people get flu-like symptoms (fever, sore throat, swollen glands) when they first get infected, but most people don't get any symptoms at all.

Are there risks of getting HIV if I drink or use drugs?

Yes! Alcohol or drugs won't infect you with HIV, but taking risks while you're drunk or high might. When you drink or use drugs, you may not make the same decisions as you would when not under the influence. For example, you may not bother to use protection during sex, and having unprotected sex is a common way of getting HIV.

You may also take the risk of sharing a needle to inject drugs. About one quarter of all new HIV infections occur among people who inject drugs. This is due to the invisible amounts of blood that are in the needle or syringe (or other injection equipment such as cookers, water, cotton filters, straws and pipes). If you use the same needle as someone who is infected with HIV, you shoot her/his infected blood into your bloodstream.

How do I know if tattooing or piercing will be safe?

The safest way to get a tattoo or piercing is to go to a professional. In tattooing or piercing, HIV can be transmitted by tiny, invisible particles of blood on equipment that has not been sterilized correctly, and these particles can also be in the tattoo ink. **Professional piercers** use jewelry made of surgical steel or niobium and don't use stud guns. **Professional tattooists** pour ink into new, disposable containers and use these containers only for your tattoo.

Professional piercers and tattooists:

- use sterile needles every time
- wear latex gloves
- have information about safety posted in the waiting area
- give instructions on how to prevent infection (after-care)
- sterilize reusable equipment in an autoclave (a machine that uses very hot water to sterilize equipment – equipment should be sterilized at 121°C [250°F] for 30 minutes).

NEGOTIATING SAFER SEX

How do I talk about using condoms?

It can be very difficult to talk about condoms or other safer sex practices, but it is very important. **Talk about safer sex before you have sex!**

How can I raise the subject with my partner?

You can try these:

- “Don't you think that people these days need to always practise safer sex?”
- “If our relationship is going to become sexual, we should use protection.”
- “This feels really good but I want to talk about how we can have safer sex before we go any further.”

What do I say if my partner does not want to use condoms?

You can try these:

- “I find putting on condoms very exciting.”
- “Using condoms helps me relax and enjoy myself rather than worry about the consequences.”
- “I've heard that condoms help a man last longer.”
- “Using condoms shows that we respect ourselves and each other.”

If you and your partner can't agree, consider your options carefully. If you still want to have sex, consider other safer sexual activities that do not involve vaginal or anal intercourse, like kissing, massage, and masturbation, to name a few.

COMMON QUESTIONS AND SAMPLE ANSWERS

When will HIV cause people to get AIDS?

HIV attacks the immune system (the body's defense system against disease). If a person gets infected with HIV, it usually takes several years for the virus to multiply and cause serious damage to the immune system. After time, the immune system will no longer be able to defend the body from deadly infections, diseases or cancers. This is when a person is said to have AIDS.

What is sexual intercourse (“having sex”)?

Sexual intercourse or having sex is a type of physical contact between two people which involves their genital organs. Sex can be part of an intimate and loving relationship between mature individuals.

What does “heterosexual” mean?

A person who is attracted to people of the opposite gender is called heterosexual. Some people use the word “straight” when referring to people who are heterosexual.

What does “gay” mean?

A gay, or homosexual, person is attracted to people of the same gender. “Gay” is a term usually used to refer to males who are attracted to other males. The word “lesbian” is usually used to refer to females who are attracted to other females.

Is HIV only a homosexual (gay) disease?

No. With HIV, it doesn't matter who you are, man or woman, heterosexual or homosexual. It matters how you behave regarding sex and injection drug use.

How do gay men get HIV?

Just like anyone else. Any person can get HIV if he or she has unprotected sex, including vaginal, oral, and anal sex, or by sharing needles with someone who has HIV. Like anyone else, some gay men have unprotected anal or oral sex, and some share needles for injecting drugs.

What is anal sex (intercourse)?

HIV infection can be spread through both anal and vaginal intercourse, as well as through oral sex. Anal sex is the insertion of the penis into the anus of the sexual partner. This is known as a high-risk behaviour, especially if a condom is not used as a barrier.

What is oral sex?

Oral sex is the licking or sucking of the male penis or the female vulva and vagina. This is considered to be a low-risk behaviour for transmitting HIV, but can be a high-risk behaviour for transmitting other sexually transmitted infections.

What is masturbation?

Masturbation is touching your own body to give yourself sexual pleasure. There is no risk of getting HIV or any other disease or illness if you are only touching your own body.

What is a condom? How does a condom protect you from getting HIV?

A condom is a thin piece of latex rubber or polyurethane that covers the entire penis during sexual intercourse. It can prevent the transmission of HIV from one person to another if it is used properly. It can also be used to prevent pregnancy since it stops the male's sperm from reaching an ovum (egg) in the female's body.

What happens to a person when he or she gets HIV?

When someone first gets infected with HIV, the person usually feels well for many months and possibly years. But, gradually, as the virus damages the immune system, the person may feel tired, lose weight, and develop skin rashes and swollen glands. There are many medications available that can help people to live longer and healthier lives with HIV. Eventually the person with HIV may get sick with cancer, pneumonia or even brain damage. The advanced state of the disease is called AIDS. Even in this stage of sickness, people can recover to some extent and live for several years. Sooner or later, however, most people with AIDS get too sick for the medication to work, and then they die.

(Note: The early symptoms are so general and common that some kids who experience these symptoms may think they have HIV. Reassure them that these symptoms are also caused by less serious illnesses. For people with HIV, these symptoms often do not go away.)

How does a person know if he or she has HIV?

The only way to know is to get a special blood test. People should talk to their doctors if they are worried about HIV.

How did the children who have HIV get it?

If a woman who has HIV becomes pregnant, there is a chance that she will pass the virus on to her unborn child. The baby may also get infected while it is being born or through the mother's milk. Currently, very few children in Canada have HIV.

How long do you live if you have HIV or AIDS?

Starting from the time people first get infected, most will live 10 to 20 years, some shorter, some longer. From the time when they are said to have "full-blown AIDS", the average time is shorter, 1 to 2 years.

Will there ever be a cure for HIV or AIDS?

Scientists all over the world are looking for a cure and a way to prevent HIV. They have not yet found a cure or a vaccine. However, they are learning more and more about this disease every day. It is hoped they will discover a cure and a vaccine. There are drugs available now that help relieve some of the effects of HIV. These drugs also help people with HIV or AIDS live longer, but do not cure HIV or AIDS.

Can you get HIV from "French kissing"?

No cases of infection through French kissing or open-mouth kissing have been reported. Most experts agree that kissing is OK and does not spread HIV because there is not enough virus in the saliva of an infected person to spread the infection to someone through a kiss. There are no reported cases of family members becoming infected from kissing a person with HIV.

Can I get HIV from a blood transfusion?

In Canada, the chance of getting HIV through a blood transfusion is very small since all blood is now tested and treated. You cannot get HIV by donating blood, since only new, sterilized needles are used.



Finding more information...

There are many places to go to find correct and up-to-date information on HIV/AIDS in Canada. You can call or visit your local health clinic, which should have pamphlets or books on HIV/AIDS. You can also ask for assistance from trained nurses, doctors or health care professionals, or make an appointment to visit your family doctor to talk about the issue.

There are local community groups such as AIDS service organizations, Planned Parenthood agencies, public health departments, and other sexual health organizations that have information and help to offer.

The public library may have information on HIV/AIDS, and the librarian or desk clerk can help you research and find this information.

Each province and territory has a hotline with operators who are trained to provide information about HIV/AIDS, other STIs, and other sexual health issues.



Alberta: 1-800-772-2437
British Columbia: 1-800-661-4337
Eastern Arctic: 1-800-661-0795
Manitoba: 1-800-782-2437
New Brunswick: 1-800-561-4009
Newfoundland and Labrador: 1-800-563-1575
Northwest Territories: 1-800-661-0844
Nova Scotia: 1-800-566-2437

Nunavut: 1-800-661-0795
Ontario: English: 1-800-668-2437
French: 1-800-267-7432
Prince Edward Island: 1-800-314-2437
Quebec: 1-888-855-7432
Saskatchewan: 1-800-667-6876
Yukon: 1-800-661-0408, x 8323

There are also many great web sites that can help you learn the information you need to talk to kids about HIV/AIDS and related issues. Here are a few to get you started.



www.canadian-health-network.ca – The Canadian Health Network's (CHN) goal is to aid Canadians in finding the information they're looking for on how to stay healthy and prevent disease. CHN has a broad selection of resources and information about HIV and AIDS. Topics include preventing HIV transmission, practising safer sex, and HIV/AIDS testing. CHN also has information on sexuality and reproductive health.

www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hast-vsmt/index.html – The Public Health Agency of Canada's (PHAC) Surveillance and Risk Assessment Division conducts national surveillance and research on the epidemiology and laboratory science related to HIV/AIDS. See their "Epi Updates" for up-to-date statistics on the pandemic in Canada.

www.pptfc.ca – The Planned Parenthood Federation of Canada (PPFC) promotes healthy sexuality throughout the human life cycle, supports birth planning, and provides information and advocacy on sexuality and reproductive health issues. PPFC conducts research, monitors trends, fosters public awareness, and provides education and counseling services on sexual and reproductive health.

www.sexualityandu.ca – A great Canadian web site devoted to sexuality education and information. The site provides credible and reliable information on the topics that are most important. From Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) to contraception awareness, lifestyle choices to talking about sex, this site offers you guidance and advice that will help you develop and maintain a healthy sexuality.

www.teachingsexualhealth.ca – An innovative web site developed by educators and health professionals to help achieve excellence in teaching sexual health.

www.youthco.org – The Youth Community Outreach (YouthCO) AIDS Society is a youth-driven agency which provides educational initiatives and support services to youth infected with and/or affected by HIV/AIDS.

www.aidsida.cpha.ca – The mandate of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Information Centre is to provide information on HIV prevention, care, and treatment to community-based organizations, health and education professionals, resource centres and others with HIV and AIDS information needs in Canada.

For additional copies of this document or other documents on HIV/AIDS, contact the **Canadian HIV/AIDS Information Centre**
400-1565 Carling Avenue, Ottawa, ON K1Z 8R1
1-877-999-7740

Email: aidsida@cpha.ca Web: www.aidsida.cpha.ca