

Intervention programs
show promise for reducing
risk in adolescents

Preventing **HIV** infection

HIV/AIDS

Although the overall incidence of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, has declined recently, the impact on adolescents continues to increase. Estimates in recent years show that approximately 1 in every 4 new infections of HIV were in people ages 13 to 21. Also, approximately one-half of all new infections were among people under 25 years old. The data underscore the need for sustained prevention efforts targeting adolescents who are at risk for HIV infection.

But there is hope, according to an article in this issue of *JAMA* (page 1529). Researchers working with African American middle school students demonstrated that intervention programs that taught abstinence and condom use may be effective in curbing risky sexual behavior that could lead to exposure to HIV.

The researchers recruited 659 adolescents from schools serving low-income Philadelphia communities and placed them randomly in 3 groups: an abstinence program; a safer sex program that stressed using

latex condoms during sex; and a control group that learned about health issues not related to sexual behavior. The findings showed that both abstinence and safer sex programs can reduce sexual behavior that put the adolescents at risk for HIV, but safer sex programs may be especially effective with sexually experienced adolescents and may have longer-lasting effects.

Other findings of the study included:

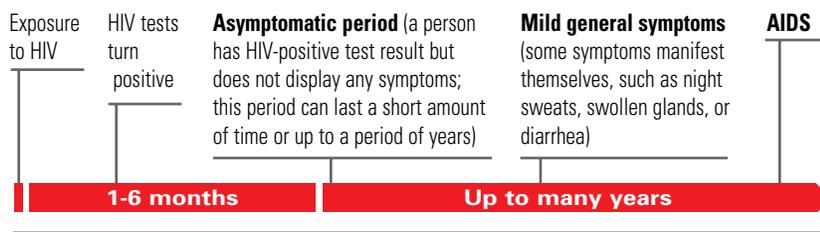
- After the program, the adolescents in the abstinence program believed more strongly than the other groups that abstinence would prevent pregnancy and AIDS; expressed less favorable attitudes toward sex; and reported weaker intentions of having sex in the following 3 months.
- After the program, the adolescents in the safer sex program scored significantly higher than the abstinence group in condom-use knowledge and believed more strongly that condoms can prevent pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and HIV.

- Adolescents in both the abstinence and safer sex groups scored significantly higher in knowledge about reducing their HIV risk than the control group.

Additional Sources: National Center for HIV, STD & TB Prevention (CDC), AMA's Encyclopedia of Medicine

PROGRESSION OF HIV:

Not all individuals who are infected with HIV have AIDS. Each year, AIDS (**acquired immunodeficiency syndrome**) will develop in between 1% and 5% of people infected with HIV. A person progresses to AIDS when the person is HIV-positive but also has a low count of particular white blood cells (CD4+) that are attacked by the virus or at least one of 26 conditions (as listed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) that occur only in people with weakened immune systems. Given enough time, experts believe all HIV-positive people would eventually develop AIDS; but some people are able to delay the progression much longer due to a number of factors, including their overall general health and the way they respond to treatment.



HOW HIV IS TRANSMITTED:

HIV (**human immunodeficiency virus**) is found in bodily fluids, such as blood, semen, and vaginal secretions, and is spread by unprotected sex with an infected person, sharing needles with injecting drug users, and much less commonly, through transfusions of infected blood. Babies born to HIV-infected mothers may be infected before or during birth, or through breast-feeding. HIV cannot be transmitted through casual contact at work or home.

HOW TO PREVENT HIV INFECTION:

- Abstain from sex
- For the sexually active, use latex condoms during any kind of sexual contact
- Do not share needles

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

CDC National AIDS Hotline
800/342-AIDS
800/344-7432 (Spanish)
800/243-7889 (TTY)
<http://www.cdc.gov/nchstp/od>

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