

# HIV: Teens

Here are some common questions from parents and caregivers of teens who have HIV.

## What does my teen need to know about HIV?

- If your teen does not already know that he is infected with HIV, **now** is the time to talk about it. He needs to know about his infection. Read our handouts on *HIV Facts* and *HIV: Talking to Your Child*.
- Teens are physically able to engage in “adult-like” behaviors (such as sex and drug use). He needs to know everything an adult with HIV knows to make good decisions.
- For teens who already know they are HIV positive, the biggest worry right now may be how to tell friends and/or sexual partners that they have it. Teens may not know how to talk to others about HIV. The more you can talk with your child and offer help through these difficult times, the easier this will be for him.
- Young adults living with HIV infection have questions about sex, getting married and having children. Answer honestly and openly. When you do not know the answers, have your teen talk to his doctor. Read our handouts on *HIV: Talking to Your Child About Sex* and *HIV: Teens and Sex*.
- Respect your teen’s ability to be fully involved in his medical care. Involve him in medical discussions, and value his input. This helps build his confidence in understanding and living responsibly with HIV.

## How can I help my teen stay safe from germs?

Your teen should know all the ways HIV can be spread. Remind her that HIV is spread by exposure to blood, infected needles and sexual contact. Many teens become sexually active during this age period. It is *very* important that your child know all of the issues involved in becoming sexually active as a person infected with HIV. Remind your teen:



- Not to touch other people’s blood and not to allow others to touch her blood. Read our handout on *HIV: Infection Control*.
- That it is not OK to share a toothbrush or razor with someone else.
- To wash hands often. This is the best way to stop the spread of germs. Always wash before eating or handling food. Always wash hands after using the bathroom and after touching any blood.

## What about medicines?

- By age 14, most children are able to take their own medicines with little help from you. You still need to check to make sure all medicines are being taken.
- By age 18, teens should be able to take all of their medicines on their own. By this time, your child needs to know everything about his medicines so that as he begins to move out into the world and away from you he is fully capable of taking medicines.
- If your teen is having a difficult time taking medicines, ask for our handout on *HIV: Making Medicines Easy*.

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## What about brothers and sisters?

- Talk about HIV in an open, honest and loving way within your family.
- Keeping information private *within* a family can create distrust and anger.
- As children grow older, they are more able to understand and keep some information private, if needed.
- Tell each of your children about HIV when they are ready to listen and understand.
- Be aware that if one child knows more than another, there could be some resentment.
- Creating a warm and loving space for your infected child and his siblings allows them to talk about HIV and work through their feelings about the disease and how it affects them and their family.

## How can I help my teen do well in school?

- If you feel your teen is having difficulties learning at school, talk to your child's teachers and think about having your child tested.
- Testing can help find your child's strengths and weaknesses. It can also help you find out what changes can be made to help your teen learn. Contact your child's teacher or school counselor if you have any concerns.
- When teens finish high school, many begin to think about their future —work, training programs, college or moving away from home. Talk to your teen about her plans for the future and help her think through all of her options.

## Anything else I should know?

- Treat your teen the same as you would any other teen so he can lead a full and happy life. Give your teen with HIV the same activities, responsibilities and discipline (nurture and guidance) as you would any other teen.
- As your teen nears 18 years old, your child's doctor will begin talking about your child's move from pediatric to adult care.
- If you, your child or someone close to your child is nearing the end stages of life ask your child's doctor or nurse for more information on how to help you and your child cope with death. Ask for our handout on *HIV: Helping Children Understand the End of Life*.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Your child's health care provider
- Visit these Web sites:
  - [www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)
  - [www.pedaids.org](http://www.pedaids.org)
  - [www.seattlechildrens.org](http://www.seattlechildrens.org)
- Read our handouts on:
  - *HIV Facts*
  - *HIV: Making Medicines Easy*
  - *HIV: Infection Control*
  - *HIV: Talking to Your Child*
  - *HIV: Helping Children Understand the End of Life*
  - *HIV: Talking to Your Child About Sex*
  - *HIV: Teens and Sex*

Some of the material in this handout was adapted from the following Web sites:

[www.4woman.gov/HIV/children.cfm](http://www.4woman.gov/HIV/children.cfm)

[www.aids.org](http://www.aids.org)

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Disclaimer: The inclusion of any Web site link (or resource accessed through a link) does not imply endorsement by Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center. Seek the advice of your child's health care provider before you act or rely upon any information from these resources.

*Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Please call Marketing Communications at (206) 987-5205.*

*This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Children's Hospital. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's health care provider.*