

HIV Testing Among Adolescents: What Schools and Education Agencies Can Do



Routine HIV testing for adolescents and adults aged 13–64 years is one of the most important strategies CDC recommends for reducing the spread of HIV.¹ HIV testing is also an integral part of the *National HIV/AIDS Strategy* to prevent the spread of HIV and improve health outcomes for those who are already infected.² Because youth spend a significant part of their day in school, education agencies and schools can play key roles in supporting HIV testing.

Why HIV Testing Is Important for Adolescents

Many young people in the United States remain at risk for HIV infection. In 2010,

- Youth aged 13–24 years accounted for 7% of the estimated 1.1 million persons living with HIV infection.
- 26% (about 1 in 4) of the estimated 47,500 new HIV infections were among youth aged 13–24 years: 57% among blacks/African Americans, 20% among Hispanics/Latinos,* and 20% among whites.³



Adolescents engage in behaviors that put them at risk for HIV infection. Among U.S. high school students in 2013,⁴

- 47% have had sexual intercourse at least once.
- 34% are currently sexually active.
- 41% of currently sexually active students did not use a condom the last time they had sexual intercourse.
- 15% have had four or more sex partners.
- 6% had sexual intercourse for the first time before age 13.

Knowing one's HIV status is one of the most important parts of prevention. Studies show that people who know they are infected are far less likely to have unprotected sex than those who do not know.⁵ Early diagnosis of HIV infection and linkage to care enable people to start treatment sooner, leading to better health outcomes and longer lives, and reducing the risk of spreading HIV to others.

CDC recommends routine HIV testing for adolescents and adults, with repeat testing at least annually for those at higher risk.¹

*Hispanics/Latinos can be of any race.

How Schools and Education Agencies Can Support HIV Testing

Collect and use health risk behavior data.

CDC's national Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), a school-based survey that monitors health risk behaviors among high school students, measures the percentage of students who have been tested for HIV infection. According to the 2013 national YRBS, only 13% of 9th–12th grade students had ever been tested for HIV.⁴

Although the national YRBS data are useful for characterizing HIV testing trends nationwide, state and local data are also needed to examine local trends in testing behaviors, identify disparities in testing for certain groups, and determine whether young people at high risk are being tested. Starting in 2015, the state/local standard questionnaire will include a question measuring HIV testing. More information is available at www.cdc.gov/yrbs.

Teach students about HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Educating students about HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) could increase students' likelihood of being tested.⁶ According to an analysis of YRBS data, HIV testing was more common among students who had ever been taught in school about AIDS or HIV infection (13%) than among those who had not (10%).⁶ The CDC's 2006 School Health Policies and Programs Study found that nationwide, in required health education courses, 85% of high schools taught students how HIV is spread and 77% taught students how HIV is diagnosed and treated.⁷ High schools can strengthen their HIV prevention curricula by including information on locations and procedures for obtaining free, or low-cost, confidential HIV testing.

Support student access to HIV counseling and testing services.

Schools can play a critical role in facilitating access to HIV testing. A school-based referral program can help connect students to adolescent-friendly community health care providers.^{8,9} Some schools may be able to offer on-site testing in conjunction with a school-linked or school-based clinic or in partnership with mobile (e.g., van-based) testing programs.

Promote communication between parents and adolescents.

Effective communication between parents and adolescents about HIV is important. Approximately 60% of adolescents aged 15–19 years report that they have not had a conversation with their parents about how to prevent HIV infection.¹⁰ Schools can encourage activities shown to promote parent-child communication, such as assigning sex education homework assignments to be completed with a parent or trusted adult, or providing multi-session parent-child sex education programs.¹¹



Educating students about HIV and STDs is important.

HIV Testing Resources

Get the facts about HIV and STD testing. Find out more at—

- CDC HIV Testing:
www.cdc.gov/hiv/testing/index.html
- Evidence-Based HIV Prevention Interventions:
<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/adolescenthealth/registries.htm>
- National HIV and STD Testing Resources, a searchable database of testing sites by city, state, and ZIP code:
www.hivtest.org
- Adolescent AIDS Program information about youth-friendly HIV testing, counseling, and care:
www.adolescentaids.org
- Get Yourself Tested Campaign:
www.cdcnpin.org/stdawareness/GYT.aspx



Talking about HIV testing is beneficial to students.

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