# Teen Sexual Health

## Part 1.1 - Justification

Sexual health education is an incredibly important subject that needs to be taught at all stages of education. It raises awareness of many health issues, such as the prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STI) in society, and leads to safer sexual behaviour.

One clear example of the effect of sexual health education would be the downwards trend of teenage pregnancy in Australia; between 1971 and 2020, there has been a 86% decrease in births from 15 to 19 year old (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021; Linda Mann et al., 2020). However, communities that have not yet or are unable to receive such education, such as Indigenous Australians and Torres Strait Islanders or those who are economically disadvantaged tend to have a higher teenage fertility rate than the rest of Australia.

To add to the importance of this topic, educating teenagers reduces the number of risky sexual decisions that they take; educated teenagers tend to have less sexual partners and use protection more often that those who have not received such education (CDC, 2021). This can mitigate the spread of STIs in our communities (12,a - HIV and AIDS), which still remains a large problem within developed countries, where almost half of the STI cases happen to be teenagers (Advocates for Youth, 2021).

## Part 1.2 - HIV

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) that targets and weakens the human immune system; currently, 38.4 million people have HIV.

| Demographic | Count |
| --- | --- |
| All | 38.4 million |
| Adult | 36.7 million |
| Female | 19.7 million |
| Male | 16.9 million |
| Children | 1.7 million |

### How HIV works

HIV is a retrovirus (a family of viruses that encode their genetic material as RNA), that can be transmitted through bodily fluids such as blood, semen, and vaginal fluids; common routes of transmission are through the use of unclean syringes - for either illicit drugs or in hospital - and sexual intercourse.

HIV infects the human immune system, specifically helper T cells, macrophages, and dendritic cells; all essential parts to the correct functioning of this system. On top of that, HIV embeds itself within the lymphatic system, particularly the lymph nodes, where it may stay dormant (latent) for several years. In response to this infection, the body will often command these infected immune cells to undergo apoptosis (a way to “dispose” of cells safely).

As more of these helper T and other immune cells are killed, the immune system becomes increasingly weakened, which allows for opportunistic pathogens to take hold in the body, and it sometimes leads to the development of cancer cells in the body.

#### Symptoms

HIV is broken into 3 different phases: acute HIV, clinical latency (AKA chronic HIV), and symptomatic HIV. The acute HIV phase are indicated by the very first symptoms of HIV and occur shortly after the infection. Its symptoms include:

* A fever,
* Headache,
* A sore throat,
* Diarrhoea,
* Weight loss, and
* Coughing.

These symptoms are similar to cold symptoms, and often so mild that people do not notice it, thus making it difficult to diagnose. Despite this, the viral load within the bloodstream is the high during this phase, allowing for the transmission of HIV. This is then proceeded by clinical latency: when HIV lays dormant for several years. This is accompanied by no symptoms. Finally, there is symptomatic HIV, which is the stage when the more severe symptoms appear, such as:

* Fever,
* Swollen lymph nodes,
* Pneumonia, and
* Shingles

Those with HIV are also more prone to getting sick. Eventually, if left untreated this can develop into autoimmune deficiency syndrome (AIDS).

#### Treatment

Sadly, HIV cannot be cured, but luckily, it can be suppressed. It is difficult to cure HIV as it remains embedded in the lymph nodes, where they can reproduce and re-enter the bloodstream. Using medications, we are able to kill all the HIV in the bloodstream, but without continual consumption of this drug, HIV return back into the bloodstream

A way to suppress HIV is through antiretroviral therapy (ART), which keeps the viral load within the bloodstream under a detectable amount, which will allow safe sex between a person with and a person without HIV.

#### Prevention

As with many other STIs, the proper usage of protection can be used to mostly protect against HIV. The use of male and female condoms has been found to cut down the chances of getting HIV by a substantial amount. On top of that, the aforementioned ART can also protect others from getting HIV. When the proper HIV treatment (including ART) is used by pregnant women, the probability that the infant also has HIV can be reduced to less than 1%.

Several governments have also created programs that hands out clean needles to both hospital and drug users to curb the number of HIV cases caused by reusing the same needle on several people.

### HIV Support Groups

There are various support groups that exist specifically for HIV, as it is such a pressing and important health issue that continues to plague us. In Australia, there are lots of non-government organisations that people with HIV can turn to for help, such as [NAPWHA](https://napwha.org.au/), [AFAO](https://www.afao.org.au/), and [WAAC](https://www.waac.com.au/). There exist further resources at [Youth Solutions](https://youthsolutions.com.au/support/hiv-hepatitis-and-sexual-health-services/) and [Health Direct](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/hiv-infection-and-aids" \l "resources) (the latter also provides valuable information on HIV).

To add to that, those who believe they have HIV and are in a position where they could have gotten HIV are able to see their local hospital to get a check-up.

### Talking about HIV

HIV, being an extremely stigmatised topic, can often be difficult to talk about, thus this is important to take into consideration when talking about HIV. If you are the person listening, do not stigmatise or ostracises them. It is often this stigma that makes talking about HIV so difficult, so do not propagate that cycle. On top of that, be respectfully, listen, and do not be disingenuous; they probably chose you to talk to as they trust you. Finally, when you can, try to learn more about HIV.

If you are the person talking, first talk to your family and friends that you trust. Try to be direct, but take you time, and be clear about what you want to say. You will also need to inform your sexual and needle-sharing partners. You can choose to do this with a help of a counsellor, or if you want, a health professional can inform them anonymously.

## Part 1.3 - Health Promotion

A good health promotion (about HIV) should focus on not only informing the public about a certain health concern, but also providing additional resources, how to approach the issue, and ways to mitigate the transmission. This is what I intend to do for my HIV health promotion. I would like to:

1. Inform the public on the impact of STIs, especially HIV;
2. How HIV works, as understanding something allows people to do something about it;
3. Prevention and treatment;
4. How to approach and talk about HIV; and
5. Provide external resources.

This would be done to raise awareness about HIV and aid those who currently have it, as well as informing teens about how to prevent the spread of HIV.

### Key Message

The key message for this campaign would be to *learn more*, as I believe that learning about a certain topic will:

1. Spur people to take action;
2. Lessen the stigma about HIV; and
3. Allow people to understand how HIV works.

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