

# HIV and AIDS

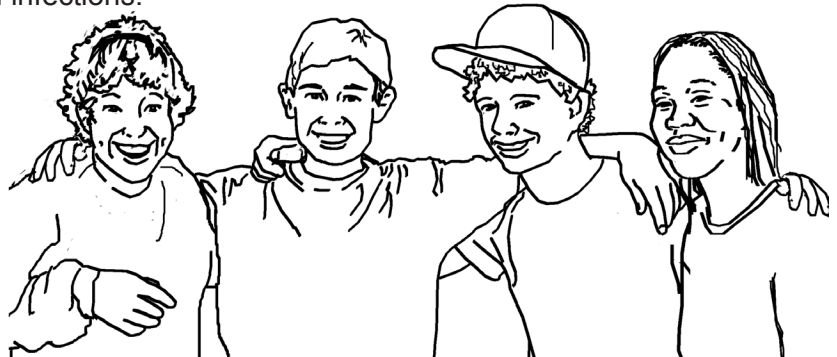


You may be wondering, “What should my fifth grader know about HIV and AIDS?” Your child may have heard something about HIV and AIDS in a news report or on television. He or she may have questions and perhaps some wrong information.

Your school board has approved the teaching of HIV and AIDS lessons in the fifth grade. Your child has learned the following concepts:

- AIDS is a disease caused by a virus called Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).
- HIV is different from most germs. It gets into the body through blood-to-blood contact.
- How HIV damages the immune system when it gets into the body. Then, the immune system is not able to prevent other diseases and infections.

- HIV **cannot** be caught by:
  - touching someone infected,
  - sharing pencils or toys with someone infected,
  - hugging someone infected,
  - playing with someone infected,
  - talking to someone infected, or
  - coughing and sneezing without covering your mouth.



- HIV is spread by sharing needles and by having sex with a person who is infected with HIV.
- Preventing the spread of HIV means avoiding contact with other people’s blood.
- Treat people who are HIV infected or have AIDS in a caring way. Play with them when they feel like it and show caring when they don’t feel well.
- Scientists and doctors are working to find a cure for AIDS, effective treatment for HIV infection, and a vaccine to prevent the spread of the disease.

We believe this information will help your child understand the facts about HIV and AIDS and reduce any fears your child may have. Your child will know what a fifth grader can do to protect him or herself from infection and ways to show kindness to people who are HIV infected or have AIDS.



## Your child has been asked to make the following promises.

“I will:

- protect my health and prevent the spread of HIV infection by not doing anything that would put someone else’s blood in contact with my blood.
- protect the health of others by not doing anything that would expose other people to my blood.
- treat people who are HIV positive or who have AIDS with respect.
- share what I know about HIV and AIDS with others.
- talk to my parents or another trusted adult if I have questions about HIV or AIDS.”

We asked your child to share the promises with you. This is a wonderful way to open the door for discussions on your family’s values and beliefs.

## Did You Know...

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome and is caused by a virus called HIV. HIV is spread by blood-to-blood contact. That means the blood of an infected person must get into the blood of another person in order for the disease to spread.

At first an infected person doesn't look or feel sick. They may not look or feel sick for several years. Eventually, the virus usually causes damage to the immune system and the person cannot fight off germs any longer. When this happens, the person gets sick. Finally, the immune system is damaged to the point that life-threatening diseases develop. This is when the person is diagnosed with AIDS. Many people infected with HIV are still living. However, they will probably die sooner than if they were not infected with HIV. There is no vaccine to prevent the spread of this disease, nor is there a cure.

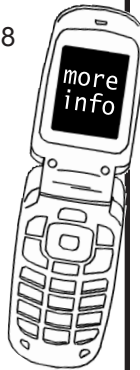
While we hear a lot about people with AIDS, there are many more people who are infected with HIV, but haven't developed AIDS yet. It is crucial for our children to know how to avoid blood-to-blood contact with everyone so they don't expose themselves to HIV or other diseases.

### You can get more information from these resources:

- CDC INFO: 1-800-232-4636 (English and Spanish; available 24/7)
- Hearing impaired hotline: 1-888-232-6348
- Michigan AIDS Hotline: 1-800-872-2437
- Family physician
- Local Public Health Department
- Local AIDS Hotline
- Your school

### These web sites will also provide accurate information:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): [www.cdc.gov/](http://www.cdc.gov/)
- American Red Cross: [www.redcross.org/services/hss/hiv aids/](http://www.redcross.org/services/hss/hiv aids/)
- American Social Health Association: [www.ashastd.org/](http://www.ashastd.org/)
- Michigan Department of Community Health: [www.michigan.gov/mdch/](http://www.michigan.gov/mdch/)



## Children With HIV or AIDS

We have discussed the fact that not many children are infected or have AIDS, but some are. You may want to tell your child the following information to help him/her understand.



When children are infected with HIV, it is usually from their infected mothers when they are born. The other way children have been infected is from blood that was contaminated with the virus. Currently, the blood supply in this country is very safe, so the chance of being infected with HIV from blood transfusions or clotting factor (in the case of hemophilia) is very, very low.

## Answering Questions About HIV and AIDS

We have encouraged your child to ask you questions about HIV infection and AIDS. You can provide your child with information and reassurance about this disease.

As your child approaches the teenage years, you may want to discuss the two main ways HIV infection is spread: sharing needles and sexual intercourse. Needles can be used for injecting legal or illegal drugs or for body piercing or tattooing. Sexual intercourse is the most frequent way HIV spreads. We encourage you to communicate your family values and beliefs about sexual intercourse to your child. Abstinence from sexual intercourse and sharing needles is the only guaranteed way to prevent the spread of HIV.

When your child comes to you with a question, you might find it helpful to keep the following points in mind.

- Listen carefully to the question.
- Repeat the question back to be sure you have understood what is being asked.
- Give a simple, short answer that is appropriate for your child's age.
- Check to make sure your child has understood the answer.
- Give your child a chance to ask more questions.



It is okay to take a "time-out" to think about your answer. Tell your child that his or her question is important. You want time to think about the answer. Set a time to talk with your child later. Another way to respond to a question when you aren't sure of the answer is to say, "I don't know, but I'll try to help you find the answer."