

THE QUESTIONS ADOLESCENTS ASK MOST FREQUENTLY ABOUT

HIV/AIDS and the New Generation

AND THEIR ANSWERS

Vol. 6



This booklet was developed together with adolescents
by REPRO 

Recent studies in Tanzania show that a large percentage of adolescents are sexually active. At the same time they lack basic knowledge about the functioning of their bodies and the risks involved in becoming sexually active at an early age. This ignorance often puts them at risk. Unwanted pregnancies, hazardous abortions, as well as sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS are a real threat to uninformed youth.

This booklet has been developed in response to this situation. It is meant to provide youths with information on the most crucial facts and to guide them in becoming responsible decision-makers for their own lives. Without sufficient knowledge adolescents cannot make informed choices, and experience has shown that informed youth often choose the safer option!

All of the questions in this booklet have been collected in recent years by counsellors and researchers working with adolescents. The youth originate from different regions of Tanzania and their ages range from 11 to 20 years. Please note that none of the questions are made up by adults!

The booklet has been developed by a multi-disciplinary team of social scientists, medical doctors and education specialists. The adolescents were involved in all stages of the process. With the publication of this booklet, we hope to contribute to the prevention of avoidable hardship for adolescents, caused by their ignorance.

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Where does HIV/AIDS come from?

There are lots of discussions about the roots of HIV/AIDS, but until now, there is no conclusion. Some



people say that the virus was made in a laboratory by accident. Some say that the virus existed for a long time in the forests of Central Africa and that it was transmitted through interaction between monkeys and people. However, there is no total certainty about the source of HIV/AIDS.

Actually it is not too important to know where the disease comes from and who discovered it. The most fundamental thing is to know that this disease has spread into all countries in Africa and that we must protect ourselves, because there is neither a cure nor a vaccination against it.

What does the term HIV/AIDS stand for?

The term HIV/AIDS stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. The name of the disease already tells us about the characteristics of the disease, namely that the immune system of a person suffering from HIV/AIDS is weakened and that his or her body has a limited capacity to fight infections from other diseases.

What is the immune system?

The immune system is a system which helps the body to protect itself from diseases. The white blood cells in the human body play an important role in the immune system. In the same way soldiers defend their country,

these white blood cells protect the body against diseases. Once these white blood cells are attacked, the body loses its capacity to protect itself against sickness and disease.

What happens when the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) enters the body, and where in the body does it go?

These viruses are located in the white blood cells of human body fluids, especially in blood, in seminal fluid, in the vaginal fluid and in the milk of breast-feeding mothers. The white blood cells are the preferred place for HIV to live and reproduce. Once the viruses are



inside the body, they settle and increase their numbers within the white blood cells until these blood

cells burst. The viruses, which are then released, continue to attack other white blood cells. The more white cells burst, the more viruses are released and the number of white cells decreases. As a result, the immune system of the person becomes weaker and weaker.

What is the difference between HIV and AIDS?

HIV is the abbreviation of the term "Human Immunodeficiency Virus". HIV is the virus, which causes AIDS. AIDS, on the other hand, is the name of the disease, once its symptoms become visible.

The difference between HIV and AIDS therefore is that a person who is infected with HIV can still be a healthy looking person. Although the viruses can be found in his or her blood, they have not started yet to attack the white blood cells. On the other hand, the immune system of a person with AIDS has already lost its strength and as a consequence he or she suffers from different diseases. At this stage the disease AIDS has fully developed.

How long does it take until HIV can be identified in your blood after you have been infected with HIV?

After being infected with HIV it takes approximately three months until the virus can be identified in the blood by using a special test kit in a laboratory.



If someone goes for an HIV test, he or she should make sure to ask which system is used at the respective testing facility and how many months have to elapse between the infection and the test, for the test to give proper results.

Do all people with HIV develop AIDS and if yes after how much time?

Yes, after a certain time all people infected with HIV start to develop AIDS itself. However, the time between the infection and the onset of AIDS varies among different individuals. Some live a long time without getting any symptoms of AIDS. The average life span between infection and death for adults is 10 years, while for children who are infected under the age of five it is only 1 to 3 years.

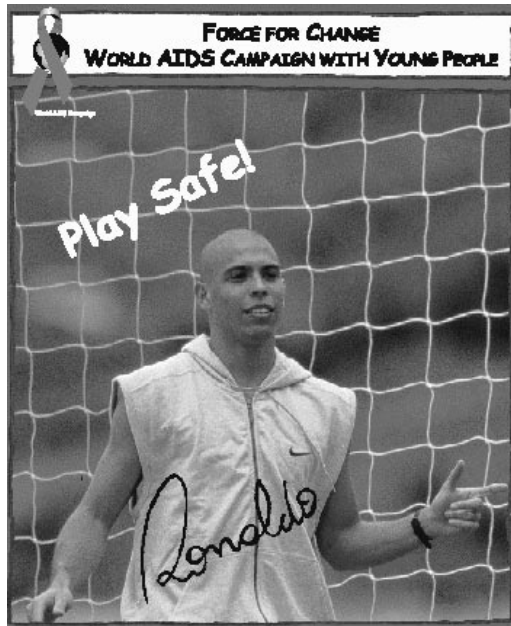
There is no answer to the question how long a person with HIV can continue to live. The number of years an infected person survives depends on many things, as for example the immune system itself, the diet of a person, the number of viruses in the body, and on whether a person always treated other diseases fully and immediately whenever they occurred.

Can a healthy looking person be infected with HIV/AIDS?

Yes, a healthy looking person can be infected with HIV. In the first phase after infection, a person has the

viruses in his or her blood, but he or she does not show any signs of illness. This phase can last up to more than 10 years! This is very dangerous, because if you have sex with this healthy looking person carrying the HIV in his body, he or she can infect you.

It is not easy to identify a person with HIV//AIDS, especially when he or she is in the first phase after being infected. The only way to be completely sure about whether a person is infected with HIV or not is by conducting a blood test at the clinic. Therefore, having sex without protecting yourself with a condom can endanger your life, even if the person you have sex with looks perfectly healthy.



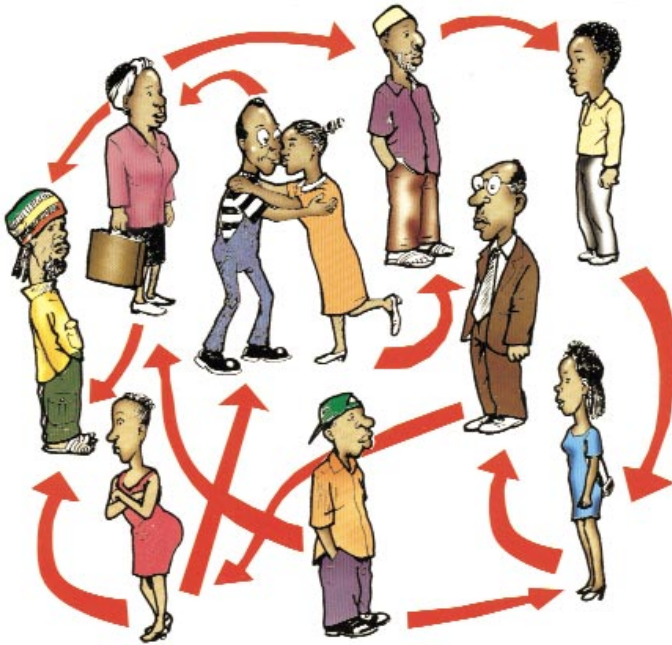
What are the physical signs of having HIV/AIDS?

Once the HIV viruses have attacked the immune system of the body, that is the white blood cells, the body's capacity to fight diseases decreases. Other diseases can attack the body easily and the body has no energy to defend itself.

People who suffer from AIDS often lose a lot of weight, some have fevers again and again, some constantly have diarrhoea, and some have wounds on their sexual organs or in their mouth. But if you get one or two of these symptoms, do not think immediately that you are infected with HIV/AIDS. There are other diseases, which show the same symptoms. If you have doubts, consult a doctor for further information.

What behaviour contributes to the proliferation of HIV/AIDS?

HIV is mainly spread through sexual contact. Below you will find some of the most common behaviour, which contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDS.



If a person has many lovers, the probability of getting infected increases, because each lover is a potential source of infection. People also put themselves at risk, if they have unsafe sex, that is penetrative sex (vaginal or anal) without using a condom.

In addition, treating other sexually transmitted diseases too late contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDS. If a person suffers from another sexually transmitted disease, the HIV viruses can enter this person's body more easily, because of sores on the sexual organs.

Finally, the abuse of drugs and excessive drinking can weaken a person's capacity to make sound decisions about his or her sexual life.

If a man withdraws his penis before ejaculating can he infect himself or the woman with HIV/AIDS?

Yes, even if the man withdraws his penis before ejaculating, the transmission of HIV/AIDS can occur. It is dangerous for the man, as well as for the woman, because the viruses are in the vaginal fluids and the fluids of the penis. Especially, if one of the lovers has sores or small cuts on his or her sexual organs, HIV/AIDS can be transmitted easily.

Withdrawing the penis from the vagina before ejaculating is not a way of preventing the transmission of HIV/AIDS.

Will I get HIV/AIDS for sure if I have sex with an HIV positive person without a condom?

If you have sex with an HIV positive person without a condom, the probability of getting infected with

HIV/AIDS is very high. Because sexual intercourse involves close physical contact, it is very dangerous to have sex with a person who is infected with HIV without using a condom.

Until today, the condom is the only tool available for self-protection against HIV/AIDS when having sex. If the condom is used properly every time you have sex



Did you know
that I am
watching your
health?

with a person infected with HIV, the probability of getting infected is very low. Using a condom properly means using a new condom, putting it on the penis properly and removing it before the penis loses its stiffness.

Is HIV/AIDS also transmitted through anal or oral sex?

Yes, there is a big danger of getting infected with HIV/AIDS when having oral or anal sex.

The skin in the anus is very soft and the probability of getting small cuts during sexual intercourse is big, also because there are no body fluids to smoothen penetration, as for example in the vagina. It is very easy for the viruses to pass through these small cuts into the body of the women. Similarly, the man can be infected, if blood from the woman's body enters his body. Therefore, there is a danger of getting infected for both of them.

Oral sex is also dangerous. If a woman has small cuts or wounds in her mouth or the man has sores on his penis, they can infect each other.

People are advised not to have sexual intercourse in these ways, unless they use condoms in order to prevent infection with sexually transmitted diseases or even HIV/AIDS.

Can I get HIV/AIDS through deep kissing?

The probability of getting HIV through deep kissing is very small. By exchanging saliva during kissing alone, it is not possible to transmit HIV. However, if one of the

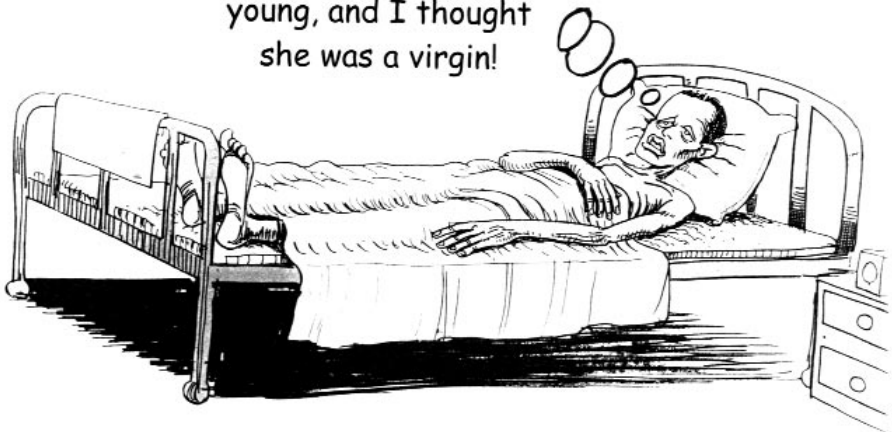
lovers or both have small cuts or sores in their mouth, the probability of getting infected is increased.

Can I become infected with HIV/AIDS when having sex with a very young person?

Yes, you can get infected. The probability of getting infected does not depend on the age of your lover, but it depends on his or her health! If the boy or girl is already infected with HIV and you have sex with him or her, you can get infected.

Often you can not know whether a person is already

But she was so young, and I thought she was a virgin!



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infected with HIV or not, because in the first stage after the infection there are no visible symptoms at all. In addition, it is very bad behaviour to seduce young boys or girls into having sexual intercourse. For the safety and benefit of all, everyone is advised not to engage in sexual relationships with young boys or girls.

Why do married people also get HIV/AIDS?

There are two major reasons for married people to get HIV/AIDS. Firstly, one or both of the partners can already be infected with HIV on the day they get married. Even a person who looks completely healthy can carry the viruses in his body on the wedding day, if he or she has had sex with an infected person in the past. If a person, who has already had sex in his or her life, does not have a blood test before getting married, there is no certainty that he or she is healthy.

Secondly, they can become infected after marriage, if one of them has sex with another person. If one or both have sexual intercourse with another lover, they can get infected with HIV and infect their wife or husband.



Can I get HIV/AIDS when wearing an HIV positive person's clothes?

No, HIV/AIDS is not transmitted by wearing an HIV positive person's clothes, because the viruses die after a short time if they are out in the air. However, according to basic rules of hygiene, it is better to wear freshly washed and ironed clothes.

Can I get HIV/AIDS when using the same razor blades and syringes as an HIV positive person?

Yes, you can get infected when using the same razor blades or syringes as a person infected with HIV/AIDS.

The use of sharp instruments, such as syringes, knives and razor blades is dangerous. If after their use, blood remains on the instruments and if they are used immediately without being washed or sterilised, their use can cause the transmission of various diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

It is, therefore, most important not to share such instruments with other people and to clean and sterilise them each time they are used.

Can I get HIV/AIDS through mosquito bites?

No, mosquitoes and other insects cannot transmit HIV, because of the characteristics of their body. The HIV viruses cannot live in the body of the mosquito, because it is not the environment they like. The viruses live and reproduce in the white blood cells, but a mosquito does not have such cells in its body. The HIV viruses therefore die once they enter the body of the mosquito and there is no danger of transmission, if the mosquito bites another person later on.

Another proof of this fact is that we would probably all carry HIV, if mosquitoes could transmit those viruses,

because we all live in an environment with mosquitoes and close to other people.

Can I get HIV/AIDS by eating with an HIV positive person?

No, if you eat with a HIV positive person you cannot get infected with HIV/AIDS, unless both of you have sores in your mouth and you exchange saliva for example when sharing a spoon. However, this probability is so low that we can say that there is no danger of getting infected with HIV/AIDS when eating with an HIV positive person.



On the other hand, according to basic rules of hygiene it is advisable for every person to use his or her own plate and cutlery and to wash it thoroughly after each use.

Can I get HIV/AIDS when donating blood or being given blood transfusions?

It is important to distinguish between donating blood and being given blood transfusions. There is no danger involved in donating blood, if the health worker uses sterilised syringes and instruments when taking the blood.

Normally there is no problem in receiving blood, because all blood is tested for HIV/AIDS before transfusion in hospitals. If blood is tested and sterilised syringes are used, it is perfectly safe to receive a blood transfusion.

Can contraceptive pills protect me from getting HIV/AIDS?

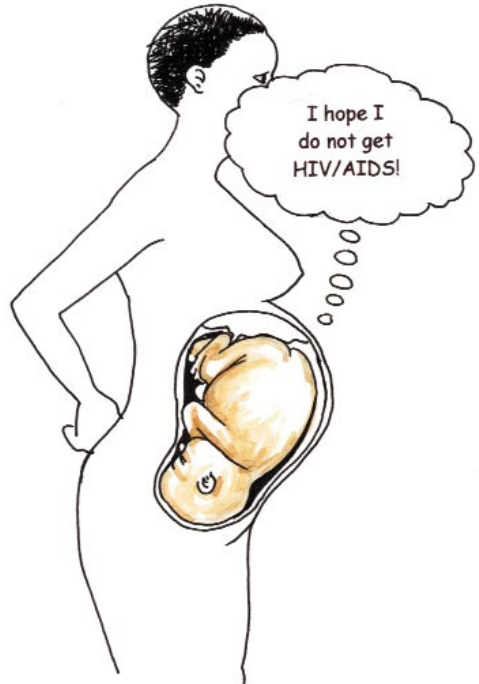
No, contraceptive pills prevent women from getting pregnant, but not from getting HIV/AIDS. If you have

sex with a person who is already carrying HIV you can be infected, because sexual intercourse involves exchanging body fluids such as seminal fluid, vaginal fluid.

Can a HIV/AIDS positive woman bear a child?
And will she infect her baby in her womb or when breast-feeding?

Yes, an HIV/AIDS positive woman can bear a child like any other woman. However, it is most important to remember that there is a high probability of infecting the child with the disease.

The baby in the uterus is nourished through the blood of the mother. If the mother has HIV/AIDS, the baby can get the virus. However, not all of the babies of HIV positive mothers carry the virus. Whether a child is infected or not



depends on the amount of viruses in the blood of the mother and many other things. Research has shown that about 75% of the children born from HIV positive mothers are not infected with the virus.

An infection can also take place during delivery and when cutting the umbilical cord. In addition, an HIV positive mother can infect her child when breast-feeding, because there are HIV viruses in the mother's milk. Women with HIV/AIDS are advised not to bear children.

What does the red ribbon stand for?



The red ribbon is a sign for acknowledging the existence of HIV/AIDS and a call for uniting with others in order to fight the disease. In addition, people who wear the red ribbon want to express their sympathy and respect for all people who are infected and living with HIV/AIDS. The red ribbon is not used to indicate that the person wearing it is infected with HIV/AIDS.

Which percentage of the African population is infected with HIV/AIDS?

According to latest statistics, in Eastern and Southern African countries about 10% to 30% of all citizens were infected with HIV by the end of 1999. On average, more people are infected in towns or socially busy places. Many of those infected are young people between the ages 15 and 24.

What can I do to protect myself from HIV/AIDS?

There is no vaccination against HIV/AIDS, but there are certain modes of behaviour, which contribute to protecting yourself from HIV/AIDS. Not having sex at all is one of the ways to prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDS. Being faithful to one partner who is not infected with HIV/AIDS is another way of protecting oneself. But that requires that both partners were healthy when they first had sex.

In addition, it is advisable to immediately seek treatment for other sexually transmitted diseases, once they occur. The sores caused by other sexually



transmitted diseases allow the exchange of vaginal fluids, fluids of the penis and blood when having sexual intercourse. Through these wounds the HIV viruses can pass easily.

Following the rules of safer sex is another way of protecting oneself from being infected with HIV/AIDS. Safer sex on the one hand includes physical contacts, which do not involve the penetration of the penis into the vagina or anus. On the other hand it includes using condoms, whenever penetrative sex is practised.

Is there a remedy for HIV/AIDS?

Until now there is no cure for HIV/AIDS on earth, although many researchers are doing their best to discover one. Because HIV viruses are very clever and strong, it will take a long time to find a cure against them.

There is no cure for HIV/AIDS, but there are certain medicines, which cure some of the symptoms of AIDS. These medicines can help to temporarily improve the condition of a person who has HIV/AIDS, but they do



not kill the HIV viruses. While the person may feel slightly better, the viruses are still in his or her blood and they continue to attack the health of the respective person.

Many people are a bit confused about this question, because there are many rumours. It is most important to remember that there is no cure for HIV/AIDS, and that the only thing we can do is to prevent oneself from being infected. There is neither western, nor local medicine, which can kill the HIV viruses.

Is it true that having sex with a virgin can heal you from HIV/AIDS?

No, you can not get healed from HIV/AIDS by having sex with a virgin. There is no cure for HIV infection!

In addition, if you carry a sexually transmitted disease you endanger the health and life of the virgin, if you have unprotected sexual intercourse together!

How can I find out whether I am
HIV positive or negative?

There is only one way of making sure whether you are infected with HIV/AIDS or not. This is by testing your blood with a special method, which shows whether there are anti-bodies against HIV in the blood. These tests are done in hospital laboratories.

It is most important to remember that the HIV viruses only become visible in the human blood three months after the infection. In the three months after the



infection with HIV/AIDS, there are no symptoms whatsoever in the blood and the test can not give you an answer to whether you have the virus or not. This period is very dangerous, because an HIV positive person can be seen as a perfectly healthy person and he or she can infect other people without knowing it.

Why is HIV/AIDS testing not easily available, especially in rural areas?

HIV/AIDS testing is not easily available, because the equipment used for this test is very expensive and has to be well taken care of. Up to now testing services are mainly available at hospitals.

In major cities there are often a few organisations, which provide HIV/AIDS counselling and testing services especially for adolescents. Try to find organisations providing such services in the country you live.

If I have HIV/AIDS, what should I do?

You can live for many years after being infected with HIV/AIDS. Some people continue to live for up to five

or ten years. The number of years you continue to live depends on many things, some of which are listed below.

It is fundamental not to despair and keep up hope. Often it helps to talk to other people who have HIV/AIDS or to friends and relatives one trusts. Try to talk to your partner, in order to inform him or her about your infection. He or she might also be infected and may want to do a test. Also, it is important to respect basic rules of good health, like a balanced diet and good hygiene. In the same line it is important that the person is treated immediately if she or he gets any other diseases. HIV positive people should not abuse alcohol or smoke cigarettes, because that may weaken their bodies. If they have sex, they must use a condom, in order not to infect others.

If an HIV positive person follows these rules, he or she can probably live and enjoy life for many more years.

What is the consequence of a negative test result?

Whenever a person goes for an HIV test, he or she has usually had a reason to doubt about being or not being

infected with HIV/AIDS. Therefore, if the person gets the answer that he or she is not infected with HIV/AIDS, the person should ask himself or herself, why these doubts came up.

Once a person knows why he or she went for the test, the person should refrain from repeating the things, which exposed him or her to the danger of being infected with HIV/AIDS. For example, if a person had



sex with more than one person without using a condom, the person should from now on stop having several lovers and he or she should use a condom to protect oneself against HIV/AIDS. It is important to take all the necessary precautions in order not to be infected with HIV/AIDS.

Do HIV tests always tell the truth?

The probability of getting a wrong test result is very small, except if the test is taken within three months after being infectedd with HIV/AIDS.

As we said above, the HIV viruses become visible in the human blood three months after the infection took place. In this period of three months after the infection, there are no symptoms of the infection in the blood at all and even the tests in the clinic can not help to find out whether an infection took place or not. This period is very dangerous, because a person carrying the virus can be regarded as a healthy person and he or she can infect other people with the disease without knowing it.

How should we interact with people having HIV/AIDS and what kind of care do they need?

A person who has HIV/AIDS is a sick person like any other sick person, except for the fact that he or she needs more consolation than others, because there is no cure for the disease. An HIV positive person needs our help and advice and once the person feels that you respect and care for him or her, the burden of the disease will become lighter.



**A friend with HIV/AIDS
is still your friend!**

Appropriate care is very important for people with HIV/AIDS. An HIV positive person should have a balanced diet to maintain his or her health, in addition, the body, the clothes, the house and foodstuffs should be kept clean. If the person falls sick with another disease, thorough treatment should be sought immediately and the person should be assisted with heavy work.

A person with HIV/AIDS has human rights like any other person does. Remember that your friend or relative with HIV/AIDS still is your friend or relative!

What precautions do I have to take when caring for an HIV positive person?

HIV/AIDS is, in most cases, transmitted through sexual intercourse and by taking care of a person with HIV/AIDS you normally cannot get infected. Nevertheless, it is better to be careful and to take precautions in order to prevent an infection.

If you treat the wounds of an HIV positive person, it is better to wear plastic gloves and the wounds should

always be covered with a piece of cloth or a plaster. Instruments used by the sick person like razor blades should be kept in a separate place and should not be used by others.

These measures are important, so as to make sure that the one who is taking care of an HIV positive person does not get infected with HIV/AIDS or any other disease. If you care for a person with HIV/AIDS and you are not sure about the precautions to take, you are advised to seek assistance from a health worker for any further explanations.

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This booklet is part of a series of six booklets with the following titles:

1. **Growing Up**
2. **Male-Female Relationships**
3. **Sexual Relationships**
4. **Pregnancy**
5. **Healthy Relationships**
6. **HIV/AIDS and the New Generation**

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