

YOUNG PEOPLE AND HIV



HIGHLIGHTS

- In 2011, youth (15-24) accounted for 40% of all new global HIV infections in people aged 15 years and olderⁱ.
- In 2011, there were an estimated five million youth living with HIV and some 2400 youth newly infected with HIV every dayⁱⁱ.
- Among youth living with HIV, 3.6 million (78%) live in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Asia and the Pacific has the second highest number of youth living with HIV, with an estimated 550 000 young people living with HIV, and some 110 000 youth newly infected with HIVⁱⁱⁱ.
- Between 2001 and 2011, prevalence of HIV—a proxy indicator of new HIV infections—fell by nearly 27% among young people aged 15-24 globally^{iv}.

Today, young people (15-24) account for 40 per cent of all new adult HIV infections. Each day, more than 2400 young people become infected with HIV—and some five million young people are living with HIV^v. Young people are a fulcrum. They remain at the centre of the epidemic and they have the power, through their leadership, to definitively change the course of the AIDS epidemic.

Experience over the past decade has demonstrated how to address HIV among young people. In countries with concentrated epidemics, programmes and resources must focus on adolescents and youth who engage in risky behaviours, including injecting drugs, selling sex and men who have sex with men.

In countries with generalised epidemics, where the general population is at risk, all vulnerable young people, particularly young women, need to be targeted priority in policy and programme design. Evidence shows that sex education helps in reducing the risk of HIV by delaying the onset of sexual activity and encouraging safer sexual behaviour.

The United Nations supporting country-led responses to AIDS

The importance of preventing HIV infections among young people has been a consistent message in all HIV related commitments, especially those made by Member States at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, the 1995 World Conference on Women and the 2001 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS.

The Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS adopted by the Special Session is particularly significant as it sets essential actions to significantly reduce HIV infections among young people. In the 2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS, world leaders unanimously endorsed the goal of





achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support for all, including young people.

The Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS: Intensifying Our Efforts to Eliminate HIV and AIDS, adopted by members states at the UN General Assembly High Level Meeting on AIDS in 2011, committed to harnessing the energy of young people in helping to lead global HIV awareness, as well as to encourage and support the active involvement and leadership of young people, including those living with HIV, in the fight against the epidemic at the local, national and global levels, and agree to work with these new leaders to help to develop specific measures to engage young people about HIV.

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) brings together the efforts and resources of ten UN system organizations and the UNAIDS Secretariat to help prevent new HIV infections, treatment and care for people living with HIV and mitigate the impact of the epidemic. Specialized technical assistance on HIV to countries is provided through the UNAIDS Technical Division of Labour.

The UNAIDS Secretariat focuses on advocacy, leadership and strategic information, the Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization focuses on HIV and sexuality education in educational institutions, the UN Population Fund coordinates issues surrounding adolescents and youth in and out of school, UNICEF centres on adolescent development and social protection, the International Labour Organization concentrates on labour policies and workplace programmes and the World Health Organization mainly focuses on health sector and its responses.

HIV prevention among young people is one of eleven “Essential Programmatic Actions for HIV Prevention” in the UNAIDS policy position paper Intensifying HIV prevention.

The UNAIDS Inter-agency Task Team on HIV/AIDS and Young People (IATT/YP) was established in December 2001, with the goal to foster a joint accelerated, harmonized and expanded global, regional and country-level response aimed at increasing young people’s access to and utilisation of HIV prevention, treatment, and care services to reach the goal of universal access.

Progress

The actions of young people are shaping the future of AIDS across the world.

Between 2001 and 2011, prevalence of HIV—a proxy indicator of new HIV infections—fell by nearly 27% among young people aged 15-24 globally. The largest progress was seen in South and South-East Asia where HIV prevalence among young men and women fell by 50%.

Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean followed with a drop of more than 35% among young men and women. In Latin America, HIV prevalence decreased by nearly 20% among young people. Significantly, the decline was much higher at 33% among young men, the group where the majority of new HIV infections among young people in Latin America occur.

However, this encouraging trend is reversed in Eastern Europe and Central Asia where there has been a 20% increase in new HIV infections among young people.

The majority of young people who are acquiring HIV are those who inject drugs, very few of whom have access to evidence-informed HIV prevention and treatment services.





Accurate and comprehensive knowledge about HIV is still low among young people and investment in education is needed. Delayed onset of sexual activity and increased use of condoms have contributed to a decrease in HIV incidence among young people in most of the Sub-Saharan African countries (UNAIDS 2010).

Out of 45 countries with survey-based trend data, 17 are starting to show a steady increase in HIV prevention knowledge among young women. Several high prevalence countries are also showing stabilization of their HIV epidemic with notable behavioural changes among young people in terms of age at onset of sex, multiple partners, and condom use.

Many challenges still persist in translating lessons learned into practice. Linkages between HIV and sexual and reproductive health services need to be strengthened. Programmes and financial resources continue to target young people with low risk of HIV infection instead of focusing on those most-at-risk. Legal and policies that present barriers--for example age of consent to accessing sexual and reproductive health commodities including HIV tests--need to be reformed.

Inadequate coordination between different national stakeholders, such as Government ministries and civil society organizations, continue to hinder a coordinated, comprehensive HIV response for young people.

Furthermore, young people still need more opportunities for meaningful engagement in advocacy and decision making.

Key Messages

To be effective, youth-led organizations/networks should be involved in all stages of development, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes at the national, regional and global level. This includes the participation of youth representatives at the Board of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria as well as the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board, as well as in other relevant national, regional and global institutional mechanisms.

It is essential to ensure an HIV free new generation through successful implementation of the following evidence-informed prevention strategies: youth-specific HIV and sexuality education; mass media interventions; youth-friendly rights-based sexual and reproductive health services, including use of condoms, and male circumcision. We must also reduce the risks of unsafe drug use and provide drug dependence treatment for young injecting drug users.

Increased advocacy is needed for the removal of current social, cultural, legal and policy barriers that hinder young people's access to information, skills, services and meaningful participation.

For further information

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ⁱ UNAIDS(2012) World AIDS Day Report
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ⁱⁱ UNAIDS(2012) World AIDS Day Report
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