

# If/Then

*If you care about HIV, then you should care about Sex Education!*



## HIV Prevention Includes Access to Sex Education

Everyone has the right to evidence-based, medically accurate, and LGBTQIA+ inclusive sex education, including information on HIV prevention and management. Unfortunately, young people are frequently left in the dark regarding HIV education. When HIV education is provided, it is often incorrectly taught as a “gay” disease which can lead to feelings of shame, fear, and despair. Inaccurate and stigmatizing education creates barriers to HIV prevention, testing, and treatment for ALL people - resulting in the continued epidemic of HIV. A lack of HIV education and misinformation about HIV not only perpetuates stigma and stereotyping around the disease, it also results in inequities in care for marginalized populations, especially among Black and Latinx men, men who have sex with men, and transgender women.

Several factors lead to a lack of equitable access to HIV prevention, care, and services, but many of these factors begin with a lack of sex education in schools. A majority of states currently have a policy requiring HIV education - either as part of general sex education or separately; however, there is still a huge disparity between who does and does not receive HIV education and the quality of information they receive.<sup>1</sup>

By ensuring that sex education includes **accurate and complete** information about HIV, we can reduce HIV transmission while also creating a safer, more equitable world for those with HIV.

## By Advancing Sex Education, You Are Reducing HIV

School-based sex education has been proven as an effective strategy for reducing HIV-related vulnerability.<sup>2</sup> However, only 29 states and D.C. mandate both sex education and HIV education, and 38 states only mandate HIV education. Furthermore, of the 30 states and D.C. that mandate these programs meet certain general requirements, only 18 of them require program content to be medically accurate.<sup>3</sup>

When evidence-based, medically accurate, and inclusive school-based HIV education is implemented, students partake in less risky sexual behavior and receive better grades.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, students who are at greater risk for HIV who receive inclusive sex education seek out relevant resources at higher rates than students who are not taught about these resources.<sup>5</sup> High-quality sex education, as aligned with the National Sex Education Standards, also includes information on substance misuse, including injection drug use that can increase the risk of HIV transmission.

Ensuring that every young person has access to medically accurate, evidence-based, and LGBTQIA-inclusive sex education moves the United States closer to the goal of ending the HIV epidemic. When students are empowered with the information to prevent and treat HIV and other STIs, they're able to make healthier choices.

<sup>1</sup> “Sex and HIV Education.” Guttmacher Institute, September 19, 2023. <https://www.guttmacher.org/state-policy/explore/sex-and-hiv-education>.

<sup>2</sup> Fonner, Virginia A., Kevin S. Armstrong, Caitlin E. Kennedy, Kevin R. O'Reilly, and Michael D. Sweat. 2014. “School Based Sex Education and HIV Prevention in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis.” Edited by Sten H. Vermund. PLoS ONE 9 (3): e89692. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0089692>.

<sup>3</sup> “The SIECUS State Profiles.” SIECUS: Sex Ed for Social Change.

<sup>4</sup> Ma, Zhen-qiang, Monica A. Fisher, and Lewis H. Kuller. 2014. “School-Based HIV Education Is Associated with Reduced Risky Sexual Behaviors and Better Grades with Gender and Race/Ethnicity Differences.” Health Education Research 29 (2): 330–39. <https://doi.org/10.1093/her/cyt110>.

<sup>5</sup> Davila, Jessica A., Nancy Miertschin, Shubhada Sansgiry, Heidi Schwarzwald, Charles Henley, and Thomas P. Giordano. 2012. “Centralization of HIV Services in HIV-Positive African-American and Hispanic Youth Improves Retention in Care.” AIDS Care 25 (2): 202–6. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540121.2012.689811>.

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## High Quality Sex Ed Works

- ✓ Sex education often serves as young people's first introduction to HIV symptoms, prevention, and treatment.
- ✓ Utilizing accurate sex education helps decrease misinformation regarding HIV and facilitates open and unbiased discussions that reduce stigma and discrimination.
- ✓ Sex education can clarify HIV prevention strategies, symptoms of HIV, and ways to access care if a person tests positive for HIV. It can also identify those more at risk of HIV and create culturally appropriate and responsible information tailored for those groups.
- ✓ Without sex education, young people are going to be uninformed or misinformed regarding HIV testing, prevention, and treatment methods.

## If You Are An Advocate or Policymaker

- ✓ Support federal legislation such as the Real Education for Healthy Youth Act (REAHYA) that includes accurate, inclusive, and trauma-informed information on HIV in sex ed curriculums and increases access to sexual health services for marginalized young people.
- ✓ Remove barriers to federal funding for harm reduction programs that are vital to ending the HIV and overdose epidemics.
- ✓ Bolster efforts that increase access to HIV pre-and post-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP and PEP), such as the PrEP Access and Coverage Act.
- ✓ Support legislation to protect non-discrimination protections for people living with and vulnerable to HIV and/or LGBTQ+ people, such as the Equality Act and the REPEAL HIV Discrimination Act.
- ✓ Support funding for the CDC's Division of Adolescent School Health DASH and Teen Pregnancy Prevention, two evidence-based programs that allow more young people to access medically accurate, age and developmentally-appropriate, LGBTQIA-inclusive sex education.
- ✓ Center the voices and experiences of young people of color within HIV advocacy, paying special attention to parent notification barriers.
- ✓ Provide much-needed support for the intersecting HIV, viral hepatitis, and overdose syndemics that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic by funding the Opioid Related Infectious Diseases line at the CDC.