

# 05 WHY YOUNG PEOPLE NEED TO LEARN ABOUT HIV/AIDS AND SEX

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- Young people are sexually active
- Young people do not have sufficient knowledge about HIV/AIDS
- Research has shown that preventive education does not lead to increased pre-marital sexual activity



*"Many people are still traditional, thinking sexuality is a private matter, they hesitate to talk about it."*

Vietnamese Cultural Approach to HIV/AIDS Prevention, Support and Care in selected areas of Ho Chi Minh City, Male doctor in public practice, Case No 6

Young people are at the centre of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. They are the most vulnerable, because they often do not have access to information, knowledge, and skills related to HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, adolescence is a period when many young people are likely to experiment with sex and drugs. Young people are also the world's greatest hope in the struggle against AIDS.

## *Young people have sex*

For many people in Southeast Asia, as well as all over the world, sexual activity begins during adolescence; i.e., before young people reach their 18th birthday. In many countries, unmarried girls and boys are sexually active even before the age of 15.

Many parents and adults wish to ignore that young people have sex. However, to stop the HIV/AIDS epidemic from spreading and to protect young people, it is essential to accept these facts. To provide sexually active young people with the knowledge, skills and means by which to protect themselves and their partners against infection with HIV is a very important step in slowing down the spread of the epidemic.

## Most young people do not have sufficient knowledge about HIV/AIDS

Awareness of the existence and threat of HIV, as well as information and knowledge about how HIV is spread and how its transmission can be prevented, is still lacking in many populations

Many young people still have misconceptions about HIV/AIDS. Some young people believe that HIV/AIDS can be cured, that it spreads by mosquito bites, or that a healthy looking person cannot be infected with HIV.

Lacking knowledge and skills, adolescents are less likely to protect themselves from HIV than adults. The older adolescents are, the more likely they are to protect themselves. Furthermore, research has shown that there is a direct correlation between level of education and condom use.

## All young people have a right to know

Young people have a right to know how they can protect themselves and others and how to mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS. They need to:

- ❑ Know about their own body
- ❑ Know about gender stereotypes
- ❑ Know about sex and sexuality
- ❑ Know about basic facts on HIV/AIDS and other STIs and the necessary skills to protect themselves
- ❑ Know their HIV status and where to find testing facilities
- ❑ Know where to get medical, emotional, and psychological support if they are living with HIV/AIDS
- ❑ Know how to shield their families and peers from HIV/AIDS
- ❑ Know about HIV/AIDS education programmes and their rights
- ❑ Know how to involve their peers in campaigning against HIV/AIDS
- ❑ Know that they cannot get HIV/AIDS by sharing a desk, textbook, food, water or bathrooms with a classmate living with HIV/AIDS



Many parents express concern that sex education will lead to greater sexual activity, or even promiscuity among teenagers. However, the opposite is the case: **HIV and/or sexual health education delays the onset of sexual activity**, reduces the number of sexual partners, decreases the number of unplanned pregnancies, reduces STI rates, and increases responsible behaviour.



*"HIV/AIDS is not only a young epidemic but also an epidemic of the young."*

Peter Piot  
Executive Director, UNAIDS