

OF REDUCING RISKS & VULNERABILITIES

Prevention is the key to reducing infection rates. Preventive education has an important role to play in minimising risk behaviour among young people and should provide young people with knowledge and skills to protect themselves. Preventive education should address both risk reduction and vulnerability reduction.



- Knowledge and skills help young people to minimise risk behaviour
- Some groups are more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS than others. Making them less vulnerable helps to curb infection.

People who engage in high-risk behaviour are more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS than others. Some people take risks because their vulnerabilities and immediate needs prevent them from being able to make choices. For example, some women find it difficult to demand condom use from their steady partners or husbands, even if they know that they are HIV+. Thus, decreasing vulnerability also means enhancing people's ability to prevent infections with HIV.

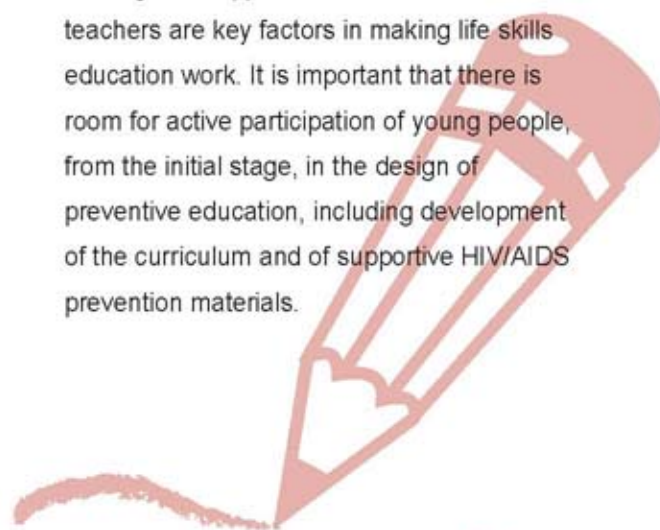
Risk reduction

Good quality education fosters analytical thinking and healthy habits. Better-educated young people are more likely to acquire the knowledge, confidence, and social skills to prevent themselves from getting infected with HIV. However, behaviour is not necessarily changed by knowledge alone. Students will need skills to put what they learn into practice through life skills education in order to build enough self-esteem to resist peer and adult pressure.

Some core life skills are:

- ❑ Negotiation skills
- ❑ Self-awareness skills
- ❑ Critical thinking skills
- ❑ Decision-making skills

Life skills can be taught in many ways, both in and out of school. Since teaching life skills is an innovative and relatively new approach, training and support for male and female teachers are key factors in making life skills education work. It is important that there is room for active participation of young people, from the initial stage, in the design of preventive education, including development of the curriculum and of supportive HIV/AIDS prevention materials.



Vulnerability reduction

Some groups of people are more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS than others. One aspect of preventive education is the focus on the conditions influencing the vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. By reducing vulnerability, preventive education decreases the likelihood of infection with HIV. The following groups are particularly vulnerable:

- ❑ **Adolescents and young people**, because they often engage in risky sexual behaviour and substance use, and because of their lack of access to HIV information and prevention services .
- ❑ **Girls and young women**, because they are biologically more vulnerable, suffer more from discrimination than men once infected, and are restricted in their choices due to social and cultural factors. Furthermore, they are often excluded from education and other basic human rights.
- ❑ **Mobile populations**, because they often leave their families and social support network behind. The resulting loneliness may force them to use sex worker services. Since they often have no support or friends in their destination city, they are also vulnerable to being sexually exploited themselves.
- ❑ **People who use drugs**, especially when they exchange needles or need to offer (unprotected) sex in exchange for drugs or money. Use of any substance, including alcohol, is associated with unsafe sexual behaviour.
- ❑ **Sex workers and their clients**, since sex workers have many sex partners whom they cannot always persuade to use condoms. As a result, many clients get infected and pass the virus on to their partners.
- ❑ **Social, sexual, ethnic, and religious minorities**, since they often do not have access to knowledge and skills that are appropriate to their own culture. Therefore, they often feel not addressed by prevention efforts developed by and aimed at members of 'mainstream' culture.
- ❑ **Street children, working children, and out-of-school children**, especially if they have no access to knowledge and skills about how to protect themselves from HIV.

Education in itself can reduce vulnerability to HIV/AIDS by increasing literacy and the general education level, by creating a sense of connectedness and security, and by providing access to trusted people.

