

FACT SHEET

Adolescents, young people and HIV

- Today, there are 1.6 billion people aged 12-24—the largest generation of adolescents and young people ever.ⁱ
- In 2010 young people aged 15–24 accounted for 42% of new HIV infections in people aged 15 and older. Among young people living with HIV, nearly 80% (4 million) live in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Globally, young women aged 15-24, have HIV infection rates twice as high as in young men, and account for 22% of all new HIV infections and 31% of new infections in Sub-Saharan Africa.ⁱⁱ
- Many adolescents living with HIV were born with the virus.ⁱⁱⁱ
- There is progress in terms of a decline in HIV prevalence among young people (aged 15–24 years) in 21 of 24 countries with national HIV prevalence of 1% or higher.^{iv} The decline in HIV prevalence and falling new HIV infections among young people worldwide and especially in sub-Saharan Africa, are occurring simultaneously with behavioural changes such as waiting longer to become sexually active, having fewer multiple partners and an increased use of condoms among young people with multiple partners.^v

Knowledge

- According to the most recent population based surveys in low- and middle-income countries, only 24% of young women and 36% of young men responded correctly when asked five questions on HIV prevention and HIV transmission.^{vi}

Gender inequalities

- In 2010, 12% of the 135 million children born that year were born to women aged 15-19, and a further 32% were born to women aged 20-24.^{vii} In some countries with high HIV prevalence, 30–50 % of girls give birth to their first child before their 19th birthday.^{viii}
- Young adolescent girls are not only biologically more susceptible to HIV infection; they are more likely to have older sexual and partners who use injecting drugs, thus increasing their potential exposure to HIV.^{ix} It is estimated that, in the last decade, over 58 million girls were married before the age of 18 years; of which, 15 million were 10-14 years old. Many were married against their will, often experiencing violence.^x When girls have access to education, they are less likely to marry early.^{xi}

Gender-based violence

- Violence and the threat of violence hampers women's, including young women's and adolescents, ability to protect themselves from HIV infection and/or to make smart decisions regarding sexual health.
- The prevalence of forced first sex among adolescent girls younger than 15 years ranges between 11% and 48% globally.^{xii}

Vulnerability of key populations

- Adolescents who sell sex or use drugs are at higher risk of HIV infection. They also may not have access to information, sterile injecting equipment and services such as HIV testing and support.^{xiii}

Meeting the challenge

- At the 2006 United Nations High Level Meeting on AIDS governments of the world committed “to ensure an HIV-free future generation through the implementation of comprehensive, evidence based prevention strategies, responsible sexual behaviour, including the use of condoms, evidence and skills-based youth specific HIV education, mass media interventions, and the provision of youth friendly health services.”^{xiv}
- Age-appropriate sexuality education can increase knowledge and contribute to more responsible sexual behaviour. Around 50% of such programmes evaluated in a 2006 review of 83 evaluations showed decreased sexual risk-taking among participants.^{xv}
- In many countries, sexual activity is initiated in early adolescence, before age 15.^{xvi} As evidence shows that sexual activity among young people is a reality, there is a need to take action to empower them to make responsible and informed decisions in regards to sexual and reproductive health, HIV and gender equality, as well as addressing gender-based violence.^{xvii}
- Programmes to prevent HIV infections among young people will be more effective if they include combination prevention approaches that are youth-friendly, and promote comprehensive services that include sexuality education, knowledge of HIV, access to sexual and reproductive health services, and discussion on harmful sexual norms and practices.^{xviii}
- Actively engaging young people in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of HIV policies, services and programmes, will enhance their leadership skills to equip them to demand youth-friendly health services and programmes.

UNAIDS

UNAIDS, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, is an innovative United Nations partnership that leads and inspires the world in achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. Learn more at unaids.org

ⁱ SG Report. Adolescents and Youth. February 2012.

ⁱⁱ UNAIDS. UNAIDS World AIDS Day report 2011. 2011

ⁱⁱⁱ UNICEF . UNAIDS. Opportunity in Crisis: Preventing HIV from early adolescence to young adulthood. 2011

^{iv} UNAIDS. UNAIDS World AIDS Day report 2011. 2011

^v UNAIDS. Outlook,Breaking News. 2010. http://data.unaids.org/pub/outlook/2010/20100713_outlook_youngpeople_en.pdf

^{vi} UNAIDS, 2011

^{vii} SG Report. Adolescents and Youth. February 2012.

^{viii} UNICEF . UNAIDS. Opportunity in Crisis: Preventing HIV from early adolescence to young adulthood. 2011

^{ix} Ibid

^x UNICEF (2005). Early Marriage: A Harmful Traditional Practice

^{xi} SG Report. Adolescents and Youth. February 2012.

^{xii} WHO multi-country study on women’s health and domestic violence against women: summary report of initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women’s responses. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2005

^{xiii} UNICEF . UNAIDS. Opportunity in Crisis: Preventing HIV from early adolescence to young adulthood. 2011

^{xiv} UNGASS (2006) *Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS*. UN New York - Paragraph 26.

^{xv} UNICEF . UNAIDS. Opportunity in Crisis: Preventing HIV from early adolescence to young adulthood. 2011

^{xvi} SG Report. Adolescents and Youth. February 2012.

^{xvii} SG Report. Adolescents and Youth. February 2012.

^{xviii} [Young people are leading the HIV prevention revolution](#) (UNAIDS, 2010)