

INTRODUCTORY

SECTION

Introduction

HIV is a very different disease today than it was when this curriculum was last published in 2005. There is still neither a vaccine to prevent HIV nor a cure for the disease, and the number of people in NYC living with HIV has exceeded 110,000. However, advances in HIV testing, treatment, and care have turned HIV into a chronic, treatable long-term condition. New laws, policies, and data have changed the way we see and think about this virus. HIV continues to affect our young people, who have a right to understand the risks that can threaten their health, and know the steps they must take to stay safe and support their peers in staying safe. We are eager to share important medical updates with our teachers in this 2012 Edition so that they can continue to teach our students the most current, relevant information about HIV, which includes:

- **Dramatic improvements in HIV treatment:** The most important advance since 2005 is that people infected with HIV are living longer, healthier lives. Antiretroviral therapy (ART), a combination of medications that stops the virus from replicating and from infecting new cells, has succeeded in keeping people's viral load low and immune system strong, keeping people healthier longer. A low viral load also helps prevent transmission of HIV to someone else.
- **New citywide recommendations for HIV treatment:** On World AIDS Day, December 1, 2011, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC DOHMH) Commissioner Thomas Farley, MD, MPH, recommended that anyone infected with HIV begin ART immediately upon diagnosis, regardless of CD4 count. Many HIV experts think this is the single most important way to improve health outcomes for someone who is infected and to reduce community viral load enough to end this epidemic.
- **New State HIV testing law:** A New York State law was passed in 2010 requiring primary care providers to offer an HIV test to all patients ages 13-64. The NYC DOHMH launched several campaigns to increase HIV testing: The Bronx Knows; Brooklyn Knows; and NYC Knows campaigns spread the word that everyone in NYC who is sexually active should be tested for HIV.
- **HIV home test kit approved:** On July 3, 2012, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved a rapid self-administered over-the-counter HIV test kit for individuals ages 17 and over. The test uses oral fluid to check for antibodies to HIV Type 1 and HIV Type 2. The kit can provide an HIV test result within 20 to 40 minutes. A positive result with this test does not mean that an individual is definitely infected with HIV but rather that additional testing should be done in a medical setting to confirm the test result. Additionally, a negative test result does not mean that an individual is definitely not infected with HIV, particularly when an individual may have been exposed within the previous three months. Recommendations on its use are forthcoming. For more information go to: <http://www.fda.gov/BiologicsBloodVaccines/BloodBloodProducts/ApprovedProducts/PremarketApprovalsPMAs/ucm310436.htm>
- **Required sexual health education in NYC middle and high schools:** In August 2011, NYC Department of Education (NYCDOE) Chancellor Dennis Walcott made sexual health education a required component of the required comprehensive health education course for middle and high school students.
- **First medication to prevent HIV:** On July 16, 2012, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved TRUVADA®, a drug previously only used to treat HIV, for daily oral use to help prevent HIV. The use of HIV medications as a preventive measure, to reduce the risk of becoming infected with HIV, is a strategy known as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). The recently approved pill contains medicines that prevent HIV from making a new virus as it enters the body. When used consistently, Truvada has been shown to reduce the risk of HIV infection among gay and bisexual men and heterosexual men and women who are at high risk for HIV infection. It is not intended to be used in isolation, but rather in combination with safer sex practices, such as consistent and correct condom use. Guidelines on its use from national health agencies are forthcoming. For more information, go to <http://www.fda.gov/downloads/NewsEvents/Newsroom/FactSheets/UCM312279.pdf>.
- **More access to HIV Prevention:** High school students have improved access to condoms through high school Condom Availability Programs, which now offer a wider variety of condoms, including female condoms. In addition, 311 and social media make it simple for all New Yorkers to identify free condom distribution sites available in most areas of New York City. That instruction is in addition to the mandated HIV/AIDS lessons that must be provided K-12 every year in every school in New York City.

Changes to the Curriculum

New “opt out” prevention lessons: This curriculum is required for all students in grades K-12, every year. Parents have always had the option to opt their children out of the “prevention” lessons. For consistency and clarity, the criteria that now identify “opt out” prevention lessons for the comprehensive health education (including sexual health education) course taught in middle school and high school will be applied to the HIV/AIDS Curriculum. For grades 6-12, “opt-out” prevention lessons are those that “teach about barrier methods used to prevent the sexual transmission of HIV/STD, or about not sharing syringes/needles.” Parents and legal guardians may not opt their children out of lessons that teach about the human body, sexuality, or abstinence. The “opt out” prevention lessons for elementary school remain the same. These lessons are identified on page xxv.

Updated parent notification letters: NYCDOE continues to recommend, but not require, principals to send parent notification letters home prior to teaching the HIV/AIDS lessons. Because middle and high schools are required to inform parents prior to teaching required sexual health education lessons, we encourage schools to use a combined notification letter in those cases (See Appendix I for both letters).