

Strategies for HIV/AIDS Prevention: What the Church Can Say and What You Can Do

Abstain from sexual intercourse outside of marriage.

Sexual intercourse is a gift for the marriage relationship. The Bible teaches people to flee sexual immorality and not to sin against our own bodies. The Holy Spirit lives in the human body, and we are called to honor God with our bodies. Abstinence is the best strategy to prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV—Human Immunodeficiency Virus.

Be sexually faithful within the marriage relationship.

When people marry, the two become one. Sexual intimacy is among the most intimate expressions of oneness and love. It enables childbearing, strengthens companionship, and contributes to growth in unity. Experiencing sexual intimacy uniquely within marriage contributes to emotional and spiritual health and wholeness as well. Sexual fidelity is a key strategy to prevent STIs and HIV.

Consistently and correctly use condoms if there is any risk of infection.

Everyone that has been sexually active outside of marriage is at risk of HIV infection, and everyone that is sexually active with a partner that has been sexually active before marriage and/or outside of marriage is at risk of HIV infection. You should use condoms consistently and correctly if you and/or your partner are at risk of HIV infection. The consistent and correct use of condoms is highly effective against sexually transmitting HIV, provides some protection against contracting some STIs, and helps to prevent pregnancies.

Delay sexual debut until at least age 21.

Sexual debut during adolescence significantly increases risks of unintended pregnancies, contracting STIs, and HIV infection. The earlier you become sexually active, the greater your risk of infections. You reduce your risk of infection significantly the longer you delay sexual activity. Delaying your sexual debut gives your body and your mind time to mature so that you physically and intellectually are better equipped to manage your sexuality. In any event, your sexual debut should be consistent with strategies **A** and **B**.

Educate yourself, your friends, and your family.

Accurate education is essential to prevent the spread of HIV and to help care for and support people infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS. More than 1 million people are estimated to be living with HIV in the United States. Nearly 40 million people are estimated to be living with HIV world-wide. There is a great need to spread clear and correct information for prevention. There is a great need to provide care for people who are HIV positive and who are living with AIDS, as well as for their families. There is a great need to reduce the stigma imposed on people living with HIV/AIDS. There is a great opportunity to learn from people living with AIDS how you can be supportive and useful to the global battle against HIV and AIDS. You can make a difference!

Forgo sharing needles for drug use with anyone at anytime.

HIV can also be acquired through sharing needles for drug use. Intravenous (IV) drug users and their sexual partners are a rapidly growing population that is contracting HIV. The vast majority of IV drug users share needles, and this increases the risk of HIV infection for the users and their sexual partners. IV drugs should not be used. Sharing needles for IV drugs should never be done.

Get tested.

Testing is the only way to know your HIV status. If you have ever been sexually intimate before marriage, or if your sexual partner has ever been sexually intimate before marriage to you, you are at risk of HIV infection. HIV can result in AIDS—Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome—and that can be deadly to you and to those you love. Get tested. Know your status. Assume nothing. The stakes are high.

One community through which you can share locally, nationally, and globally to help defeat HIV/AIDS is:

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