

MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

Let's clear the air here, and try to be aware of the many myths and plain old lies that some people have about sex and HIV. History has proven time and time again that decisions based on fictitious information can lead to disastrous consequences like disease, unnecessary suffering, and/or death.

One would be hard-pressed to trace the original source of any myth. However, like most myths, myths about HIV are based largely on ignorance and a lack of understanding about human sexuality. Using the responses of Historically Black College and University students who were chosen at random, we would like to take some time to put to rest some of the myths about sexuality and HIV/AIDS that are floating around out there. Click on the myths and misconceptions below and get clear on the facts.

Myth—“All young Black brothers and sisters are having sex these days...we're young; that's what we do.” (*Female, age 21*)

Fact— All young Black men and women are **not** having sex these days. Although there are many who are having sex, there are many young people who choose not to. Even if many of your peers are having sex, that doesn't mean that **you** have to. Don't give in to trends and peer/social pressure. *In the case of sex and HIV, maintaining your individuality could mean saving your life!*

Misconception— “My girlfriend can't get pregnant the first time we have sex. I have never heard of that happening before!” (*Male, age 23*)

Fact - If a female has begun puberty (the earliest age at which a person is capable of having children) and has had her first period, **she can get pregnant**. If a female is engaged in unprotected sex, she is not only exposed to pregnancy, but HIV as well. To be on the safe side...**ALWAYS USE PROTECTION** when engaging in any sort of sexual activity.

Misconception—“A girlfriend of mine got pregnant even when her man was using a condom. Condoms don't prevent you from getting pregnant, so why use them.” (*Female, age 22*)

Fact— Condoms are a really good form of birth control, and an excellent protection from STDs. They aren't perfect, though, so it's especially important

to know how to use them correctly. When used properly, condoms are very effective against pregnancy and STDs.

Misconception—“I really don’t see how doing drugs can make it easier to get HIV and other diseases. As far as I know, the two [drugs and HIV] have nothing to do with each other.” *(Male, age 19)*

Fact— Drugs, including alcohol, impair the judgments of the people who use them. Under the influence of drugs, individuals may risk involvement in activities that they would otherwise ignore; and what’s more, the influence of drugs may prevent us from making decisions like using protection or choosing abstinence, which would help to protect us from HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Myth—“With all this technology, you *know* there’s a cure for AIDS somewhere out there.” *(Male, age 24)*

Fact— To date, there is no known cure for AIDS and there are no vaccines to prevent HIV infection. This is all the more reason for you to protect yourself **EVERYTIME** you have sex.

Myth—“HIV/AIDS is a gay disease. I am not gay... I won’t get it!” *(Male, age 22)*

Fact— Come on!?! Anyone can get HIV/AIDS. Everyone is at risk of getting HIV from sharing needles or having unsafe sex or blood transfusion. Believe it or not, HIV is spread often through heterosexual contact. [In the United States, 33% of annual new HIV infections are due to heterosexual sex.](#)

Myth—“AIDS is a relatively ‘new’ disease; it only emerged a couple years ago, back in the 80’s.” *(Female, age 18)*

Fact— The oldest known sample of HIV positive blood was collected in 1959. Using the power of genetics, scientists have been able to confirm the existence of other strains of HIV as early as 1930!

Misconception—“I don’t think we as Americans need to worry about HIV/AIDS as much as other countries in the world, like Africa, for example.” *(Male, 23)*

Fact- HIV/AIDS is killing the people on the continent of Africa in [alarming numbers](#); and while the number of cases of AIDS and AIDS related deaths have been declining in the U. S. due to new drug therapies, there are still [40,000 NEW HIV INFECTIONS IN AMERICA EACH YEAR](#). 40, 000! - that’s a threatening number, not to mention that in 2001 [NEARLY HALF](#) of the reported AIDS cases in America were reported among African Americans.

Myth—“You can get HIV from breathing the air around an HIV-infected person or from hugging or holding hands with an HIV-infected person.” *(Female, age 19)*

Fact— HIV **cannot** be transmitted from breathing the air around an HIV-infected person, or from hugging or holding hands from an HIV-infected person. HIV *is* transmitted through contact with an HIV-positive person’s bodily fluids, such as semen, [pre-ejaculatory fluid](#), vaginal fluids, blood, or breast milk. HIV can also be transmitted through needles contaminated with HIV-infected blood, including needles used for injecting drugs, tattooing or body piercing.

Myth—“You can’t get HIV if you’re on the pill.” *(Female, age 22)*

Fact— Birth control pills do not prevent the transmission of any [sexually transmitted disease \(STD\)](#), including HIV. The pill is used to prevent pregnancy. **The surest way to prevent both pregnancy and an [STD](#) infection is through abstinence.**

Myth—“You can’t have more than one STD at a time.”

(Male, age 20)

Fact— HIV is a sexually transmitted disease (STD), and a person can be infected with more than one STD at the same time. A person is more than 2-5 TIMES more likely to acquire HIV if they already have another STD.

Myth—“**Since I only have oral sex, I’m not at risk for HIV/AIDS.**”
(*Female, age 21*)

Fact— You can get HIV by having oral sex with a man or a woman. It is important to use a latex barrier (i.e., a condom or a dental dam) during oral sex.

Myth—“**AIDS is a result of a conspiracy that was made-up to destroy Black people!**” (*Male, age 23*)

Fact— No one knows if this is true; what we DO know is that AIDS is here now and we have to deal with it! No amount of finger pointing and speculation will save the lives of the millions who die from the disease each year, only protection and information will.

- **Sources Cited**

In the United States, 33% of annual new HIV infections are due to heterosexual sex.

“A Glance at the HIV Epidemic.” HIV/AIDS Update. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed February 10, 2003.

<http://www.cdc.gov/nchstp/od/news/At-a-Glance.pdf>

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NEARLY HALF

“HIV/AIDS Among African Americans – Key Facts.” Fact Sheet. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed February 10, 2003.

<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pubs/facts/afam.htm>

2-5 TIMES

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<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pubs/facts/hivstd.htm>

- **Glossary Items**

pre-ejaculatory fluid

Need Definition

Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD)

Also called venereal disease (VD) (an older public health term) or sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Sexually transmitted diseases are infections spread by the transfer of organisms from persons during sexual contact.

- **STOP The Silence Website Elements**

ALARMING NUMBERS

See STOP The Silence, “Global Connections

GET TESTED

See STOP The Silence, “The Hook UP”

KNOW YOUR TESTING RIGHTS.

See STOP The Silence, “Know Your Testing Rights”

STD

See STOP The Silence, “My Friend, There’s HIV And...”