

WHAT DO I DO IF I AM LIVING WITH HIV AND...

Some ideas for young
women living with HIV

The background of the right half of the image features a textured, abstract pattern in shades of red, orange, and yellow. Overlaid on this is a dark purple silhouette of a woman's head and shoulders in profile, facing left. In front of her is a smaller, light purple silhouette of a child's head and shoulders, also in profile and facing left. The text 'GIRLS DECIDE' is printed in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font on the child's silhouette.

**GIRLS
DECIDE**



What do I do if I'm living with HIV and ...

... I want to date or be in a relationship?

... I want to tell my partner or my family that I am living with HIV?

... I want to protect my partner from HIV and other STIs?

... I want to practise safer sex?

... I want to get pregnant?

... I want to have a healthy pregnancy for me and my baby?

... I do not want to get pregnant?

... I want to end a pregnancy?

... I want further support?

This booklet answers questions raised by young women living with HIV about dating, relationships, sexuality and parenthood. It offers information to help you have a healthy, happy, and sexually-fulfilling life and to stand up for your rights.

Like all people, there is a lot of diversity among young women living with HIV. Whoever you are, we hope this guide provides information that is useful in helping **you decide** how to best look after your sexual and reproductive health.



... I WANT TO DATE OR
BE IN A RELATIONSHIP?

You have the right to choose whether or not to marry, have sex, and to freely express your sexual orientation and gender identity. Living with HIV should not limit the possibilities you have to love and be loved. Some young women think that if they are living with HIV, they can only have intimate sexual relationships with other people living with HIV. This is not true. You can have a happy and fulfilling relationship with anyone regardless of their HIV status. Open communication, understanding, mutual respect and shared responsibility will help you to make joint decisions regarding your sexual and reproductive health. This will also help you and your partner(s) build strong intimate relationships.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT!

A healthy, happy and fulfilling relationship with someone else starts with you. Take time to build your self-esteem, deal with your own feelings about your HIV-status, and think about what qualities you value in a partner and relationship. You can do this on your own, with other young women living with HIV or a mentor.



For more information have a look at *Healthy, Happy and Hot: A Young Person's Guide to Their Rights, Sexuality and Living with HIV* www.ippf.org

... I WANT TO TELL MY PARTNER OR MY FAMILY THAT I AM LIVING WITH HIV?

You have the right to decide if, when and how to disclose your HIV status. Many people tell their partner(s), family, friends and colleagues that they are living with HIV and receive acceptance and support. However, some may become upset or react badly. You know best if and when it is safe for you to disclose.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT!

Some countries have laws that say people living with HIV must tell their partner(s) about their status before having sex. Although these laws violate the rights of people living with HIV to choose whether to disclose, it is important to be informed on the existing laws in your country and how they may affect your decisions. Stand up for the rights of people living with HIV by getting involved in organizations seeking to change these laws.



See <http://bit.ly/criminalization> for more information.



Here are some tips for sharing your HIV status with your partner(s):

- ✓ Reflect on who you want to share your status with, why they need to know, how they may react, and the best way and time to tell them.
- ✓ Seek support from other girls and women living with HIV and learn more about their experiences with disclosure. You can practise the conversation with them first.
- ✓ Practise disclosing to one or two people you trust.
- ✓ Be prepared to talk about bigger issues that may affect your relationship. Sometimes disclosing your status means talking about a secret that you or your partner has been keeping from each other, like previous or other relationships, the use of drugs or accepting money or presents for sex.
- ✓ Know your rights and where to turn for help if needed.

... I WANT TO PROTECT MY PARTNER FROM HIV AND OTHER STIs?


You have the right to the highest attainable standard of health, including sexual health. Safer sex and sexual pleasure are easiest to achieve when you know your own body and there is open communication, mutual respect and shared responsibility for preventing unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT!

If you and your partner are both living with HIV, it is still a good idea to practise safer sex to protect yourselves from other STIs and the possible risk of getting a different strain of HIV.



To find out more about safer sex visit
www.thebody.com/index/safesex/safer.html



Here are some ways to protect yourself from other STIs and your partner from HIV:

- ✓ Learn about HIV and STIs, including how they are transmitted and how to reduce the risks of infection by practicing safer sex.
- ✓ Talk with your partner(s) about HIV and STIs, and share what you know about safer sex so you can actively work together to make your sex life safer and more pleasurable.
- ✓ Use a male or female condom when having penetrative vaginal or anal sex. This is the most effective method of protecting a partner and yourself from HIV and other STIs.
- ✓ Enjoy safer sex practices (see the following page) and avoid those that have a higher risk of HIV transmission such as douching, 'dry sex', or unprotected penetrative vaginal or anal sex.
- ✓ Go for STI screening regularly. If you have an infection that can be transmitted sexually, such as chlamydia or genital herpes, ask your sexual partner(s) to also go for screening before you have sex again so that any infections they have can be diagnosed and treated.
- ✓ Access HIV treatment if prescribed by your healthcare provider. HIV treatment lowers your viral load, which, in turn, lowers the chances that HIV will be transmitted through sexual contact.
- ✓ If a condom breaks during sex, this can increase the risk of transmitting HIV. Your partner should seek advice from a healthcare provider within 72 hours and in some places they will be able to access post-exposure prophylaxis.

... I WANT TO PRACTISE SAFER SEX?

You may find it difficult to negotiate safer sex for social and cultural reasons. Gender stereotypes, embarrassment and negative beliefs about condoms can make it hard for young women to discuss sexuality and safer sex. But talking can pay off. Many young women find that their sex life improves as they and their sexual partner(s) become more comfortable talking openly and creatively explore safer ways to experience sexual pleasure.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT!

Each person and relationship is unique. Gain confidence to talk about safer sex and tell your partner(s) what gives you sexual pleasure. You may find that asking a new or casual partner if they have a condom or presenting a condom before intercourse is all that is needed. In other cases you may need to explain how HIV and other STIs are transmitted so you can both assess and talk about minimizing risks. You may need to be prepared to deal with bigger issues like love, trust and commitment when talking about condoms in a longer-term relationship.



To find out more about condom negotiation visit www.ippf.org

Here are some tips for negotiating safe sex:

- ✓ Take time to identify, question and rethink your own beliefs about safer sex. You can do this on your own, with friends, or in a support group alongside other young women.
- ✓ Increase your own knowledge about safer sex, including the benefits and common misconceptions of male and female condoms and how to use condoms and lubricants correctly.
- ✓ Engage in an open conversation with your partner(s) about safer sex. Share your concerns around HIV, STIs, and unplanned pregnancies and how these worries interfere with your ability to fully enjoy sexual activity. Invite your partner(s) to share their thoughts on safer sex. These conversations often go better when they happen well before the heat of the moment.
- ✓ Explore different ways of sexual pleasure beyond penetrative sex such as kissing, massaging, licking, sex toys, fetishes, masturbation, touching and cuddling. Be creative! Allow yourself and your partner(s) to explore sexual pleasure.
- ✓ Keep your own supply of male and female condoms. That way you can be sure that there are always condoms available.

... I WANT TO GET PREGNANT?


As a young woman living with HIV you have the right to choose if, when, how and with whom to have children. You should never be pressured into being sterilized or told to terminate your pregnancy. If you take the right precautions during pregnancy, birth and the first year of your child's life, the chances of passing HIV to your child are very small.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT!

All women have the right to make their own choices about fertility and childbirth, regardless of their HIV status, and you should expect and receive the same level of care and support from doctors and healthcare workers as anyone else.



For more information read the booklet, *HIV and Women* www.aidsmap.com/page/1550301/



Here are some tips to help you conceive safely:

- ✓ Work with your healthcare providers and your partner to develop your strategy for a safer conception.
- ✓ Plan your pregnancy and discuss with your healthcare provider your intentions to have a child. Have a full check up before getting pregnant to ensure you start your pregnancy in good health.
- ✓ If you are taking HIV treatment and have an undetectable viral load and no other STIs, the risk of transmission is reduced, but not eliminated. If you feel comfortable, ask your healthcare provider for more information before you decide to have unprotected sex.
- ✓ If your partner is HIV-negative you can choose to collect sperm from your partner and use a syringe to insert the sperm into your vagina. This is best done when you are ovulating (your fertile period) and it is advisable to try the technique several times during your fertile period.
- ✓ If you are both living with HIV unprotected sex may result in one or both of you getting an STI or a different strain of HIV. In this situation some couples who want to have a baby choose to have unprotected sex during the female partner's fertile period.

... HAVE A HEALTHY PREGNANCY FOR ME AND MY BABY?

By doing the right things during pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding, the risk of passing HIV to your baby can be reduced to less than two per cent.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT!

Talking to other women living with HIV who have had children can help you to make informed decisions about pregnancy, birth, infant feeding options and looking after your baby's health. Many women living with HIV get pregnant and have healthy babies. Do not let your HIV status limit your desire to have children!



To find out more see the *HIV and AIDS Treatment Literacy Toolkit for Women*, www.safaid.net/?q=node/20



The following tips can help you have a healthy pregnancy for you and your baby:

- ✓ Ensure you attend regular antenatal care appointments and let your doctor or midwife know that you are living with HIV. Make a list of all the questions you want to ask before going to an appointment so that you can discuss the care that you need during pregnancy, the best method for delivering your baby and the infant feeding options available to you.
- ✓ Taking HIV treatment during your pregnancy will help to protect your baby from HIV but the type of drugs you take and how long you take them will depend on your health status. Some women need to take these drugs for a short time and then stop after the baby is born, while others will continue for the rest of their lives.
- ✓ While you are still pregnant, discuss with your doctor or midwife how you will deliver the baby. If you are in good health and taking antiretroviral drugs, your healthcare provider may advise you to have a normal delivery. Alternatively, your healthcare provider may recommend that you have a caesarean section to further reduce the risk of passing HIV to your baby during delivery.
- ✓ Find out whether it is advised to breastfeed your baby where you live. Breastfeeding may be the best option for you, particularly if you do not have access to clean water and a regular supply of formula milk. If you decide to breastfeed, you and/or your baby need to take antiretroviral drugs during the entire breastfeeding period. Discuss the options with your doctor or midwife and do not feel shy to ask questions.
- ✓ Ensure you return to the health facility after your baby is born to check that everything is alright for you and your baby. Do not forget to take your baby for regular immunizations and use these visits to clarify any doubts you may have with the midwife or nurse.



... I DO NOT WANT TO GET PREGNANT?

Even if you use condoms regularly, it is important to consider using another contraceptive method if you don't want to get pregnant. Contraception can help you prevent pregnancies. There are many methods of contraception including condoms, hormones that can be taken through pills, patches and injections, and intrauterine devices. These methods vary in how effectively they prevent pregnancies, whether they are permanent or temporary, their side effects, and whether you need medical assistance to use them.

Sometimes you may be worried about becoming pregnant because you have had unprotected sex, or you were using a condom and it broke. If this is the case, you can use an emergency contraceptive up to five days after intercourse (the sooner the better) to avoid pregnancy.

Talk with your healthcare provider about the different options for preventing pregnancies, their advantages and disadvantages, and any considerations related to your HIV status.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT!

Condoms are the only type of contraception that prevents pregnancy as well as the transmission of HIV and STIs. As they are not always used consistently and correctly it is advised to use another form of contraception as well as a condom.



To find out more have a look at the guide *HIV, Pregnancy and Women's Health* <http://i-base.info/guides/pregnancy>



... I WANT TO END A PREGNANCY?

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT!

Each country has its own laws about whether and under what circumstances abortions are legal. It's a good idea to be aware of if, where and how you can access safe abortion services in your community. You can get information on your pregnancy options and advice on safe abortions through your local family planning clinic. Treatment for incomplete abortions are legal everywhere, although services may not be widely available or youth-friendly.



For more information have a look at the booklet *I Decide: Young Women's Journeys to Seek Abortion Care* www.ippf.org

Not all pregnancies are planned. No contraceptive is 100 per cent effective, and pregnancies also result from unprotected sex and situations such as rape. You can decide whether or not to end a pregnancy. You may want to consult with people close to you or who have gone through the experience, but the decision is ultimately yours to make.

Medications or surgery can be used to safely end pregnancies – this is called an abortion. Abortions are one of the safest medical procedures if provided by a skilled practitioner in safe conditions. After a safe abortion, most women are able to have a normal, healthy pregnancy at a later date. Talk with your healthcare provider about the abortion procedure and raise any questions you may have.

You, your partner(s) or other people that you confide in may feel a wide range of emotions after an abortion – sometimes all at once – including relief, sadness, and confusion. It is good to talk with someone you trust or to visit your local family planning clinic for support and counselling.

... I WANT FURTHER SUPPORT?


Life has many ups and downs. You have the right to be free from harm and to access support and services that respect your dignity, autonomy, privacy and wellbeing. No one should make you feel bad about yourself or discriminate against you because of your HIV status.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT!

Why not try joining your local network of people living with HIV, positive women's group, or a youth-focused organization to challenge negative community attitudes that may lead to stigma against people living with HIV.



For more information about the Girls Decide initiative visit www.ippf.org



Here are some tips for getting help when you need it, including if your rights have been violated:

- ✓ Find or develop a strong support network to help you navigate and cope with the challenges of living with HIV. Your support network could include people such as family, friends, your partner(s), post-test club(s), religious groups, support workers, women's groups, online discussion forums, and other people living with HIV.
- ✓ Talk to your parent(s), caregiver(s), a trusted adult or a friend if you need support. They can help you find information and think through the possible outcomes associated with different choices. They can also be an advocate for dealing with healthcare providers, teachers, and other authorities – especially in cases of violence or discrimination. The adults that you talk to should not try to force you to make a particular decision.
- ✓ Find out where you can find support and advice in case you or someone you know is sexually assaulted, forced into a marriage, or in a violent or difficult relationship. Perhaps start by talking to your healthcare provider or someone you trust.
- ✓ Find out where you can find support and advice for living positively and dealing with HIV-related stigma and discrimination. HIV organizations and networks of people living with HIV often provide legal advice in addition to care and support.
- ✓ If you feel you are being discriminated against when you are seeking sexual and reproductive health services, ask to see another staff person or find another clinic where you feel respected.

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Published in February 2011 by the International
Planned Parenthood Federation

This publication supports the implementation of
Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration

Design by Jane Shepherd

About IPPF

The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) is a global service provider and a leading advocate of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all. We are a worldwide movement of national organizations working with and for communities and individuals.

IPPF works towards a world where women, men and young people everywhere have control over their own bodies, and therefore their destinies. A world where they are free to choose parenthood or not; free to decide how many children they will have and when; free to pursue healthy sexual lives without fear of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. A world where gender or sexuality are no longer a source of inequality or stigma. We will not retreat from doing everything we can to safeguard these important choices and rights for current and future generations.