

HIV/STI testing and prevention

ambassador toolkit



introduction

HIV remains a critical public health issue, and peer ambassadors like you play a powerful role in educating and supporting your community. this toolkit is designed to equip you with the knowledge, tools, and confidence to engage others in meaningful discussions about HIV prevention, testing, treatment, and stigma reduction. through storytelling, interactive exercises, and real-life examples, you'll learn how to connect with your peers, bust myths, and inspire action.

together, we can create a future where HIV awareness is normalized, stigma is eliminated, and more people take charge of their health.

purpose of this toolkit

this toolkit is your go-to guide for



understanding HIV prevention, testing, and treatment in a clear and relatable way.



learning how to talk about HIV with confidence and address common myths and misconceptions.



using real-life stories to inspire your peers and make HIV education engaging and impactful.



equipping you with practical activities, conversation starters, and digital tools to spread awareness.

how to use the toolkit

1

read through the HIV fundamentals section to build your knowledge.

2

engage with the fictional case studies that bring real HIV experiences to life.

3

use the myth-busting section to challenge misinformation in your community.

4

follow the teaching and engagement tools to start conversations and host discussions.

5

use the worksheets and action plans to track your outreach efforts and impact.

meet your peer ambassador guide

meet zainab

throughout this toolkit, you'll be guided by zainab, a 24-year-old student and community peer educator. like you, zainab is passionate about helping others understand HIV, debunking myths, and encouraging her friends to get tested.

zainab represents the everyday young person navigating friendships, relationships, and social norms - all while promoting HIV awareness. she'll share her experiences, answer common questions, and provide tips to help you become a stronger ambassador.



this toolkit is not just for reading—it's a guide for real-world action. keep it with you whenever you need to share information, answer questions, or lead discussions.

chapter one



amara

hey, kayo, how far with your aunty?
i heard my parents saying she has AIDS. i hope she won't die.



saminu

amara, relax. that is not a nice way to speak about
someone's family, especially when it involves HIV. HIV isn't
something to gossip about.



kayo

if you're so interested, my aunty is as healthy as anyone can
be. she takes her medication every day, and in fact, she's
doing better than many who have HIV and don't even know it.



amara

but how can someone with HIV be fine? i always thought
HIV meant you were dying.



saminu

not everyone with HIV develops AIDS. i don't know all the
details but my neighbour, zainab, and her friends hold classes
at the national centre every last friday of the month. she always
tries to invite me and gives me pamphlets, but i've never
attended. we should attend this evening. it's the last friday of
the month.



kayo

yes, let's do it. the cafe is just down the street.



both

i hope you're in? madam concern.



what is HIV?

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a virus that attacks the body's immune system. left untreated, it can weaken your defenses against infections and diseases. however, with proper treatment, people living with HIV can lead long, healthy lives.

HIV vs. AIDS

it's important to distinguish between HIV and AIDS.

HIV is the virus that, if untreated, can lead to AIDS.

AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) is the final, most severe stage of HIV infection, where the immune system is too weak to fight off other infections.



ask yourself

have I ever thought about how I could protect myself and my loved ones from such risks?

at the community meeting, we will explore

how HIV is transmitted and prevented

the importance of knowing your status through regular testing

effective prevention methods like PrEP, PEP, and condom use



quick quiz

true or false

everyone with HIV will automatically develop AIDS.

answer

false. with proper treatment, many people with HIV never progress to AIDS.

true or false

even in a monogamous relationship, regular HIV testing is important because you may unknowingly be exposed to the virus if your partner has other partners.

answer

true. regular testing ensures both partners know their status and can take steps to protect themselves and each other.

how is HIV transmitted?

HIV spreads when certain body fluids - blood, semen, vaginal fluids, and breast milk - from an infected person enter the bloodstream of someone who is HIV negative.

this can happen through



unprotected
sexual contact



sharing needles
or other injection
equipment



mother-to-child
transmission during
childbirth or breastfeeding

to do

write down any myths you've heard about HIV. you will compare these with the facts the friends will learn in the meeting.

how is HIV transmitted and prevented?

HIV is a virus that spreads when certain body fluids—such as blood, semen, vaginal fluids, and breast milk—enter another person's bloodstream. it is important to understand that HIV is not spread through casual contact like hugging, sharing meals, or using the same toilet. instead, it is mainly transmitted through unprotected sexual contact, sharing needles, or from mother to child during birth and breastfeeding. knowing how HIV is transmitted is the first step toward preventing it. when we understand the ways the virus spreads, we can take simple, effective steps to protect ourselves and our loved ones from infection.

the importance of knowing your status through regular testing

knowing your HIV status is key to staying healthy and protecting others. regular testing allows you to find out if you have the virus early, so you can start treatment immediately if needed. early diagnosis not only improves your own health outcomes but also reduces the risk of passing the virus to others. testing also helps break the stigma that surrounds HIV; when more people know their status, there's less room for rumors and misinformation. whether you are in a committed relationship or single, regular testing is an act of care and responsibility for yourself and your community.

HIV testing: knowing your status

why testing matters

knowing your HIV status is the first step in taking control of your health. early detection allows for access to treatment that keeps you healthy and reduces the risk of transmitting HIV to others.

in many communities, there's a common belief that using condoms or asking a partner to get tested signals a lack of trust, especially in serious relationships. people often think that if you're committed to one partner, you shouldn't need to protect yourself or question your partner's fidelity. however, this mindset can be dangerously misleading. if you have one partner who is presumed monogamous, but that partner actually has another partner, you're unknowingly exposed to two people. and if that second partner is also involved with more than one person, the network of exposure—and the risk of HIV—multiplies. challenging these harmful norms is crucial for creating healthier, more honest conversations about trust and safety, and for encouraging everyone to prioritize regular testing and safe sex practices without stigma.

reflection question

what would it mean for you to know your status for sure?

types of tests



clinic-based testing
done by professionals
with quick results.



self-testing kits
private, at-home tests you
can buy at a pharmacy.

effective prevention methods

protecting yourself and loved ones



condom use

this is essential for safe sexual practices, as condoms create a barrier against HIV transmission.



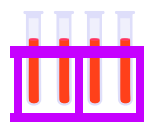
PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis)

this is emergency treatment that must be started within 72 hours after potential exposure.



PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis)

this is a daily pill that reduces the risk of HIV for those at higher risk.




regular STI testing

keeping up with all sexual health screenings ensures you're informed and can act quickly if needed.




PrEP, PEP, and condom use


there are several proven methods to reduce the risk of HIV transmission, and using them together creates a strong defense. here's how each method works and why they are important

**condom use**

condoms are a reliable barrier that, when used correctly every time, greatly reduce the risk of HIV, STIs, and unintended pregnancy.

**PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis)**

a daily pill for HIV-negative people that greatly lowers the risk of getting HIV, especially for those at higher risk or in relationships where one partner is HIV positive.

**PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis)**

an emergency HIV treatment taken for 28 days after possible exposure. it must start within 72 hours and is not a substitute for regular prevention like PrEP.

prevention methods	what they are	key points to note
condom use	a barrier method that prevents HIV and other STIs	must be used consistently and correctly during every sexual encounter. protects against HIV, other STIs, and unintended pregnancies.
PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis)	a daily pill for HIV-negative individuals, including those in serodiscordant relationships, that significantly reduces the risk of HIV infection.	works best when taken consistently. recommended for people with high exposure risk, including those with HIV-positive partners.
limiting partners	reducing the number of sexual partners to decrease the likelihood of exposure.	even in a monogamous relationship, it's important to ensure both partners are truly exclusive. communication and trust are key—but also regular testing to confirm both partners' statuses.
regular testing	periodic HIV tests that help you know your status early.	early detection leads to timely treatment and better health outcomes testing is a responsible act of care, regardless of relationship status.
abstinence	choosing not to engage in sexual activity.	significantly reduces your risk of HIV, although, sex isn't the only way people contract HIV.

activity: matching game

instructions

match each prevention method on the left with its correct benefit on the right. write down the number of the prevention method followed by the letter of its corresponding benefit. for example, if you think condom use matches with benefit A, write “1-A.”

prevention methods	benefits
PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis)	A. condom use provides a physical barrier against HIV and other STIs.
limiting partners	B. PrEP is a daily medication that offers high protection for HIV-negative individuals, including those in serodiscordant relationships.
PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis)	C. PEP is an emergency treatment that must be initiated within 72 hours after exposure.
condom use	D. regular HIV Testing allows for early detection, leading to prompt treatment and prevention of further transmission.
regular HIV testing	E. limiting partners decreases overall exposure risk by reducing the number of potential contacts.

answer key

1-A: condom use provides a physical barrier against HIV and other STIs.

2-B: PrEP is a daily medication that offers high protection for HIV-negative individuals, including those in serodiscordant relationships.

3-C: PEP is an emergency treatment that must be initiated within 72 hours after exposure.

4-D: regular HIV testing allows for early detection, leading to prompt treatment and prevention of further transmission.

5-E: limiting partners decreases overall exposure risk by reducing the number of potential contacts.

how PrEP works

PrEP works by building up a protective level of medication in your bloodstream that stops HIV from taking hold if you're exposed to the virus. when taken as prescribed, PrEP can lower the risk of HIV infection by over 90%.

who should consider PrEP?



beyond people with multiple partners, HIV-negative individuals with HIV-positive partners can benefit greatly. it gives them extra security, helps reduce anxiety about potential transmission, and supports a proactive approach to their sexual health.

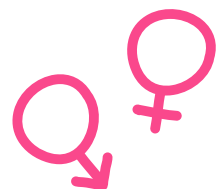
how safe is PreP?

PrEP is safe for most people and is generally well-tolerated. regular check-ups with a healthcare provider are important to ensure the medication is working well and to monitor for any side effects. it's important to note that PrEP is most effective when used in combination with other prevention methods, like condom use and regular HIV testing. together, these measures provide a robust defense against HIV.



interactive discussion for you and your friends

1. which prevention method do you feel most comfortable discussing with your friends, and why?
2. what is one new fact you learned today, and how might it change the way you approach HIV prevention?





zainab

i see some new faces today, so here's a little secret—i've been living with HIV for two years. i got it from my previous marriage. like many wives, i didn't think i was at risk until a nurse suggested i get tested. i was lucky to find a good counsellor early on, and now i'm healthy, i feel great, and i look good. you wouldn't know unless i told you. i choose to be open because there's nothing to be ashamed of



saminu

but you got married last year? Is your husband also HIV positive?



zainab

good question. my current partner is HIV negative, and we're both healthy. he protects himself with PrEP, and i take my ARVs religiously. together, we support each other and live our lives confidently.



kayo

that's really inspiring. it shows that being open and taking preventive steps, like regular testing, PrEP, and proper treatment, can empower you instead of holding you back.



zainab

exactly. HIV is just one part of my life—not my whole identity. staying informed and taking action helps us protect ourselves and break the stigma. living with HIV isn't something to hide; it's something to manage with pride and responsibility.



this chapter has introduced you to the fundamentals of HIV : what it is, how it spreads, and how to prevent it

chapter two

HIV and social norms

HIV prevention and treatment do not exist in a vacuum; they are deeply influenced by the cultural beliefs, gender norms, and social stigmas prevalent in our communities. this section explores how harmful norms contribute to HIV vulnerability and how challenging these norms can lead to healthier, more supportive environments.

key topics



how negative attitudes toward people living with HIV can discourage testing and treatment.

how expectations of masculinity and femininity can prevent individuals (especially young women) from negotiating safe sex practices or seeking help.

misconceptions and traditional beliefs about illness that can lead to dangerous practices and silence on important health topics.

negative attitudes toward people with HIV can make them feel ashamed and alone, stopping many from getting tested or treated. traditional ideas about what it means to be a man or a woman only make this worse. for instance, some men believe they are strong and must never show weakness which stops them from getting tested, while many young women feel pressured to be quiet about their needs, which can prevent them from asking for condoms or for their partners to get tested. in some cultures, women who do so get silenced or abused by their sexual partners. old beliefs and myths about HIV keep important conversations about HIV from happening, leaving people so scared of being diagnosed that they don't even get tested. these harmful ideas build barriers that stop people from protecting themselves and getting the care they need. it's more important than ever to talk openly and honestly about HIV.



activity: connect the root causes to the corresponding underlying issues below

list of root causes	social outcome
stigma surrounding HIV	delayed treatment or non-adherence to medication
lack of access to accurate sexual health information	social isolation for people living with HIV
misinformation and cultural myths about HIV	increased transmission rates
gender roles (men are dominant and women are submissive)	reluctance to get tested

answer key

stigma surrounding HIV → reluctance to get tested

lack of access to accurate sexual health information → increased transmission rates

misinformation and cultural myths about HIV → social isolation for people living with HIV

gender roles (men are dominant and women are submissive) → delayed treatment or non-adherence to medication

reflection questions

which root cause do you feel has the most impact in your community?

what is one actionable step you can take to challenge that norm?

myth busting

myths and misconceptions about HIV continue to fuel stigma and misinformation. this section uses storytelling and interactive exercises to help you identify and debunk common myths in your community.

zainab

so how did you enjoy the meeting?
did you learn anything new?



amara

i always thought you could tell if
someone had HIV just by looking
at them.



kayo

i also thought so too, until i learned
about my aunt. HIV often has no visible
signs, and many people have it without
even knowing. that's why it's important
for everyone to get tested.



saminu

before tonight, i thought HIV only affected
certain groups of people like those who
actively sleep around. but that's also a
myth—anyone can get HIV, no matter who
they are.



zainab

that's true. which is why it's important
to protect yourself by using condoms
or PrEp, and test frequently, even
people in monogamous relationships.



kayo

we need accurate information
and open conversations, not
stereotypes.



amara

i'm glad i came. i'll get tested soon
and make sure my partners do too—
or use condoms.



zainab

you can even insist they do both!



key myths and facts

✗ myths

✓ facts

you can tell if someone has HIV by looking at them.

HIV is a virus that doesn't change a person's appearance. the only way to know your status is to get tested.

HIV only affects promiscuous people or specific groups.

HIV does not discriminate; it can affect anyone regardless of lifestyle, gender, or social group.

HIV is a death sentence.

with proper treatment, people living with HIV can lead long, healthy lives.

fact or fiction game



prepare a set of questions

create a series of "fact or fiction" questions based on common myths about HIV. for example:

- HIV can be detected just by looking at someone. fact or fiction?
- only people with multiple partners can get HIV. fact or fiction?
- getting tested for HIV means you are at risk. fact or fiction?
- HIV testing is painful. fact or fiction?
- you can have HIV and not transmit to others as long as you take your medication. fact or fiction?

group activity

ask participants to vote on whether each statement is fact or fiction and then discuss the correct answer and the underlying reasons.

as early as 8am the next morning, jimmy, amara's boyfriend, calls her phone.



jimmy

i heard you went to the pharmacy to buy a HIV test-kit. do you have HIV?



amara

getting tested for HIV doesn't mean you have HIV. everyone who is sexually active should get tested frequently, and i bought an extra test kit for you, as well.



jimmy

are you saying i have HIV? have you done anything that makes you suspect you have HIV?



amara

no, i haven't, and that's not the point. i can't say you have HIV, the only way to know is to get tested.



jimmy

you can't come out of the blue and make me get tested for HIV. have i done anything to make you doubt me?



amara

if you truly care about our health and if we trust each other, you should be willing to get tested. it's not about accusing you—it's about being responsible together. if you won't get tested, then we can't continue being intimate.



chapter three

teaching and engagement tools

peer ambassadors are not just messengers, they are active teachers and role models in their communities. this section provides practical tools to help you engage your peers, spark meaningful conversations, and spread accurate information about HIV. use these strategies to create safe spaces for discussion and encourage positive behavior change.

role-play scenarios

role-playing is a powerful way to practice real-life conversations. try these ideas with your peers or in your community workshops

encouraging a friend to get tested

scenario

imagine a friend who is hesitant to get tested because of fear or shame. practice starting the conversation with phrases like, “i recently learned some great facts about HIV testing that helped me feel safe. would you like to hear more about it?”

tip

practice active listening and show empathy. focus on sharing personal experiences or lessons you learned at community meetings.

handling rumors

scenario

you overhear a friend spreading a rumor about someone’s HIV status. role-play a response that corrects the misinformation gently. For example, “i heard that rumor too, but I learned from a trusted source that HIV cannot be seen by merely observing a person’s face. let’s find out the truth together.”

tip

keep the tone calm and informative, and emphasize that accurate information protects everyone.

conversation starters & FAQs

sometimes, the hardest part is just beginning the conversation. use these starters to break the ice.

- have you ever wondered how HIV affects people today?
- do you know how HIV testing works and why it’s important?
- what is the difference between HIV and AIDS?
- can someone look healthy and still have HIV?
- what are the best ways to protect yourself if you’re in a relationship?

tip!



keep the language friendly and non-judgmental. ask open-ended questions that invite discussion rather than yes/no answers.

games and Interactive activities

games can turn learning into a fun and memorable experience. Here are some ideas

fact or fiction game

prepare a set of statements about HIV—some true, some common myths. have your peers guess whether each is fact or fiction, then discuss the correct answers.

discussion circles

form small groups and give each group a scenario related to HIV stigma or testing. let them brainstorm ideas on how to address the situation, then share their solutions with the larger group.

ambassador self-care

as an ambassador, you are on the front lines of education and support. while you work hard to help others, it is essential to take care of your own mental and emotional well-being. here are some self-care strategies and resources to help you stay strong and balanced.



self-care tips

1. set boundaries
2. know your limits. It's okay to say no to additional responsibilities if you feel overwhelmed.
3. take breaks. schedule regular breaks during your day to relax, reflect, or do something that you enjoy—whether that's reading, walking, or spending time with loved ones.
4. stay connected. talk with fellow ambassadors or trusted friends who understand your role. sharing experiences can help lighten the emotional load.
5. celebrate small wins.
6. acknowledge every effort and success, no matter how small. positive reinforcement boosts morale and motivation.
7. seek professional help. if you ever feel that the stress or emotional burden is too much to bear, remember that you can seek professional support.

remember, taking care of yourself isn't selfish—it's essential. when you are well, you can be a more effective and compassionate ambassador. your mental health is as important as the work you do for others.

community outreach tracking sheet

this tracking sheet helps you monitor your outreach efforts. keeping track of your activities, contacts, and outcomes will help you adjust your strategies and demonstrate your impact.

use the table below to log each outreach activity.

date	activity/ event	location/platform	number of people reached	key feedback/notes

reflection

at the end of each month, review your tracking sheet. write down one success and one area for improvement:

success stories: _____

area for improvement: _____

glossary & quick reference

part 1: glossary of key terms

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus)

a virus that attacks the body's immune system, reducing its ability to fight infections and diseases. if left untreated, HIV can lead to AIDS.

AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome)

the most advanced stage of HIV infection, where the immune system is severely weakened. not everyone with HIV develops AIDS, thanks to early diagnosis and treatment.

PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis)

a daily preventive medication taken by HIV-negative individuals—especially those in high-risk situations or in serodiscordant relationships—to significantly reduce the risk of contracting HIV.

PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis)

an emergency treatment that must be started within 72 hours after a potential HIV exposure and taken for 28 days to reduce the likelihood of infection.

ART (antiretroviral therapy)

a combination of medications used to treat HIV, helping to reduce the viral load and maintain the immune system, allowing individuals with HIV to live healthy lives.

condom

a barrier method used during sexual intercourse that greatly reduces the risk of HIV transmission as well as other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unwanted pregnancies.

serodiscordant

describes a relationship in which one partner is HIV positive and the other is HIV negative.

HIV testing

the process of undergoing medical tests to determine whether an individual is HIV positive or negative. regular testing is a key part of HIV prevention.

viral load

the measurement of the amount of HIV in a person's blood, used to monitor the effectiveness of treatment.

common myths	facts
you can tell if someone has HIV by looking at them	HIV does not change a person's appearance. the only way to know your status is to get tested.
HIV only affects promiscuous people or certain groups	HIV can affect anyone, regardless of lifestyle, gender, or social group. it is transmitted through specific behaviors, not personal character or identity.
HIV kills everyone infected	with proper treatment, such as ART, people living with HIV can lead long, healthy lives and prevent the progression to AIDS.
using PrEP means you are promiscuous.	PrEP is a preventive tool used by anyone at risk of HIV, including individuals in serodiscordant relationships, to protect themselves and reduce anxiety about potential exposure
in serious relationships, using condoms shows a lack of trust	even in committed relationships, condoms are important to reduce the risk of HIV, especially if there is any chance of undisclosed outside partners.
if you're in a monogamous relationship, you don't need to worry about HIV.	regular testing is essential because even in monogamous relationships, partners can unknowingly be exposed if one partner has another partner.

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