

Why has Commack Schools updated its HIV/AIDS curriculum?

Since 1987, New York State Education Department regulations have required schools to provide HIV/AIDS instruction from kindergarten through Grade 12. Information about the course of HIV/AIDS, its treatment, and its prevention has changed since the curriculum was first written. The updated curriculum contains new medical information to ensure scientific accuracy. For example, new medications have improved the quality of life and increased life expectancy for people living with HIV/AIDS. Medical advances have also reduced the rate of HIV transmission during pregnancy and childbirth. However, while these developments bring new hope, HIV/AIDS still poses a grave threat. There is still no cure for HIV infection. There is no vaccine to prevent it. Not everyone can benefit from the new medications. Education about how to prevent infection is essential. Our lessons for intermediate students focus general disease infection and hygiene.

Parents and guardians can request that their child not participate in the lessons. Please contact your school's principal about this.

Resources

<http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/FitnessandHealth/StandardsCurriculum/HIVAIDSoverview.htm>

<http://www.cdc.gov>

Some Facts about HIV/AIDS

Schools are required to teach HIV/AIDS prevention. We teach the subject as part of general disease infection and hygiene.

Today more people than ever before are living with HIV/AIDS. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that about 1 million people in the United States are living with AIDS or HIV. About one quarter of these people do not know they are infected. This puts them and others at risk.

Heterosexual transmission accounted for 33% of newly diagnosed cases in 2006.¹

In 2006 an estimated 56,300 individuals were infected with HIV.¹

In 2007, 541 adolescents 13-19 years of age were reported with AIDS in the United States and dependent areas. New York State reported the greatest number of cases anywhere in the United States, with an alarming 109 cases among adolescents.²

In 2007, teen girls represented forty percent of all HIV cases reported in the U.S. among people 13-19 years old.²

At the end of 2006, an estimated 545,805 deaths among people with AIDS had occurred in the U.S., including 14,016 in 2006.¹

¹ CDC, *HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report*, Vol. 18, 2007;

² CDC, *HIV/AIDS Surveillance in Adolescents* (through 2007).

Commack Public Schools

HIV/AIDS Education in Grades 3, 4 and 5: An Overview for Parents and Guardians

2009-2010

How do the lessons help students stay healthy?

The HIV/AIDS curriculum provides age and developmentally appropriate lessons to help children and adolescents understand the nature of HIV/AIDS, methods of transmission, methods of prevention, and ways to support friends or loved ones who may be living with HIV/AIDS. Lessons use strategies that reinforce the importance of communicating with parents/guardians, teachers, and other caring and appropriate adults. Interactive activities foster such skills as planning and goal setting, communication, assertiveness, decision making, and limit setting. In keeping with a comprehensive health education focus, students study not only HIV but also how our bodies stay healthy or become sick.

How do I know this curriculum is appropriate for my child?

One of the most important goals in this curriculum is to ensure that each of the lessons is age appropriate. Children need medically accurate information presented in a way and at a time appropriate to their level of development.

Examples of what students learn in grades 3, 4, and 5...

General basics of disease prevention: washing hands, covering your mouth when you sneeze or cough, and cleaning and bandaging cuts. Children learn not to touch other people's blood, and to ask adults for help when someone is bleeding. They learn that HIV is a blood borne virus that impairs the immune system. Lessons focus on how the immune system works and how HIV is transmitted. They also learn to develop empathy for children and adults who are living with HIV/AIDS. Activities focus on how to resist negative peer pressure and "choose companions who share your beliefs, values, and interests." Students are told to stay away from alcohol and other drugs, and never to share needles or other sharp objects that can transmit blood from one person to another.

Why do these lessons talk about attitudes and skills students need?

Giving students medically accurate and age appropriate knowledge about HIV/AIDS is only part of what students need to learn.

Lessons cultivate attitudes of responsibility and empathy. They help students develop the skills that allow them to make the right choices in all aspects of their lives. For example, students learn to resist peer pressure and avoid risk behaviors.

Is there really a need for these lessons?

Yes. Research shows that significant numbers of young people still engage in behaviors that put them at risk for HIV infection.