

# INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL 303

## Herbert S. Eisenberg ACADEMY FOR CAREER EXPLORATION

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Dear Parent or Guardian:

HIV/AIDS is one of the most serious health problems Americans have ever faced. Advances in medicine have made tremendous strides in keeping people infected with HIV healthy for many years. Still, it has no cure, and education is the only way we can help our students protect themselves from becoming infected.

The New York State Education Department and the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) require that HIV/AIDS education be provided for all students in kindergarten through grade 12. The *HIV/AIDS Curriculum* that NYC DOE developed for NYC students is age and developmentally appropriate. For example, in kindergarten, students learn how people get sick and how to get better. In 7th grade, children learn how HIV affects the immune system, the risks of alcohol and drug use, and the importance of communicating with parents/guardians or caregivers. High school lessons teach students to avoid behaviors that put them at risk for HIV, STDs and unintended pregnancy.

As a parent or legal guardian, you have the right to excuse your child from certain HIV/AIDS lessons that teach about methods of HIV/STD prevention. These "opt out" prevention lessons are identified in the *HIV/AIDS Curriculum*, which is online at <https://www.weteachnyc.org/resources/resource/hivaids-curriculum-2012-edition/>,

If you would like your child to be excused, you must write a letter to me stating that:  
Your child should not be in the classroom during the "opt out" prevention lessons; and  
You will teach your child about prevention at home.

Encourage your child to speak with you about HIV/AIDS. Doing so can help you reinforce your child's awareness of how HIV is transmitted, and present opportunities for you and your child to discuss how abstaining from sexual intercourse is the most important and effective way for children to protect their health and their future.

We welcome your involvement on our School Wellness Council or to coordinate PTA presentations about HIV/AIDS. Speak to your child's teacher, parent coordinator, or me about how you can support the lessons. If you have any questions regarding this program, please call me at (718) 996-0100.

Sincerely,

M. Caggiano  
PE & Health Teacher

R. Duclosel  
PE & Health Teacher

Carmen N. Amador  
Principal

## Is there really a need for HIV/AIDS lessons?

Yes. New medications have improved the quality of life and increased life expectancy for people living with HIV/AIDS. Medical advances have drastically reduced the rate of HIV transmission during pregnancy and childbirth. Although 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 medications, and research shows that significant numbers of young people still engage in behaviors that put them at risk for HIV infection.

## Are the HIV lessons required for all students?

Principals are responsible for assuring that a minimum of five HIV/AIDS lessons are taught every year in kindergarten- grade 6, and six lessons in grades 7-12.

## How are teachers prepared to handle these sensitive and important health topics?

A series of training programs for administrators and teachers introduces them to the curriculum. Part of the training focuses on how to create a safe, comfortable, nurturing environment for presenting these lessons.

## A FEW REASONS WE NEED AN HIV/AIDS CURRICULUM IN THE NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

We must begin HIV/AIDS prevention education early, for children and adolescents.

New York City (NYC) remains the epicenter of HIV/AIDS in the U.S. More than 110,000 New Yorkers are living with HIV, and thousands more don't know they're infected. NYC's AIDS case rate is almost 3 times the U.S. average. <sup>1</sup>

Each year, nearly 1,000 people in NYC don't find out they are HIV positive (infected) until they are already sick with HIV. People who find out they are HIV positive and start treatment early tend to have better health outcomes. They can also prevent spreading the virus to others. <sup>1</sup>

A New York State law, passed in 2010, requires primary care providers to offer an HIV test to all patients ages 13-64. <sup>2</sup>

In 2011, 39% of all NYC public high school students reported having sex. <sup>3</sup>

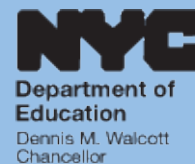
12% of high school students reported having sex with 4 or more partners. <sup>3</sup>

More than one in three sexually active high school students did not use a condom the last time they had sex, putting themselves and/or their partners at increased risk for HIV, other sexually transmitted infections, and/or unwanted pregnancy. <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. *HIV Epidemiology & Field Services Semiannual Report*. 2011; 6(2). [http://home2.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/dires/2011\\_2nd\\_semi\\_rpt.pdf](http://home2.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/dires/2011_2nd_semi_rpt.pdf). Accessed July 5, 2012.

<sup>2</sup>New York State Department of Health. Amended HIV Testing Public Health Law. [http://www.health.ny.gov/regulations/public\\_health\\_law/part\\_63/docs/amended\\_part63.pdf](http://www.health.ny.gov/regulations/public_health_law/part_63/docs/amended_part63.pdf). Accessed July 5, 2012.

<sup>3</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2011. *MMWR* 2012; 61. <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss6104.pdf>. Accessed July 5, 2012.



# HIV/AIDS EDUCATION

## Information for Parents

### Age Appropriate

For students in grades K-12.  
Required in every grade.

### Medically Accurate

Developed with the New York City  
Department of Health and  
Mental Hygiene

## How do the lessons help students stay healthy?

The DOE 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 responsible 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.

## 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 healthy choices in all aspects of their lives. For example, students learn to resist peer pressure and avoid risk behaviors.

## 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. Throughout the program abstinence is stressed as the most appropriate and effective way of avoiding sexual transmission of HIV and other diseases.

## What if I, as a parent/guardian, have concerns?

After you have reviewed the curriculum, communicate any questions, comments, or concerns to school staff. All children are required by New York State regulations to receive lessons on the nature of HIV/AIDS and methods of HIV transmission. Parents have the right to opt their children out of the individual lessons on methods of prevention. We believe that these lessons are age appropriate and protective, but if you prefer to opt your child out, you must send a letter to your child's principal requesting that your child be removed from the classroom when prevention lessons are given. Your letter must state that you will provide your own prevention lessons at home. You are welcome to request curriculum materials to help you do so.

*September 2012*

## EXAMPLES OF WHAT STUDENTS LEARN IN ALL GRADES

**Grades K-3** General basics of disease prevention: washing hands, covering mouth when sneezing or coughing, 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. They also learn to develop empathy for children and adults who are living with HIV/AIDS.

**Grades 4-5** Lessons focus on how the immune system works and how HIV is transmitted. 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. Abstinence from sexual contact is stressed.

**Grades 6-12** Some lessons include HIV testing and address methods of prevention, including the correct and consistent use of condoms, which can greatly reduce the risk of infection from people who are sexually active.