

Risk Behaviors and HIV in Older Children and Teens

Youth who have HIV or were exposed to HIV at birth may have unique challenges as they become teenagers. We wanted to understand how much these challenges affect youth in PHACS.

What we did

We asked youth and their parents a series of questions. These questions were about their experiences with these problems.

What kinds of problems did we look at?

We looked at:

- Mental health issues
- Sexual risk behaviors
- Using alcohol and/or drugs
- (for HIV+) Adherence to their HIV medications

Who we studied

349 youth in PHACS AMP ages 10 to 16

- 238 HIV+ youth
- 111 youth without HIV who were born to mothers with HIV

What we found

About half of the children and teens were affected by **at least one** of the problems we looked at. Some (11% - 16%) had two or more of these problems. Also:

- 28% had mental health issues. This was the most common problem.
- About 16% said they had used drugs or alcohol (mostly alcohol).
- About 16% said they had started having sex. Of those, more than half said they did not always use a condom.
- More than 33% of youth with HIV said they had missed doses of their HIV medications in the past week.

What we learned

Youth who have HIV or were exposed to HIV may be at risk for mental health problems, risky sexual behaviors, alcohol and/or drug use, and not taking HIV medications the right way.

More services are needed to help youth make healthy decisions about sex and drug & alcohol use as they grow up. Services to provide support for mental health problems are also needed.

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Reference Info:

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*2011. AIDS Patient Care
STDS (25), pp. 385-294*