

## Explaining HIV Infection to Youth

It is important that school health professionals inform young people about HIV, what it is, how it works, and how to prevent infection. The following table provides a good summary of these concepts in a way that can be meaningfully relayed to adolescents during a brief interaction.

### Basic Concepts for Explaining HIV to Adolescents

- The HIV antibody test is a test for HIV infection, not AIDS.
- An antibody is like a “footprint” indicating that someone has been exposed to HIV.
- People may carry the virus in their bodies for many years before developing HIV-related symptoms or AIDS.
- HIV affects the ability of the immune system to function properly.
- New drugs are intended to prevent the virus from reproducing in the body to keep the immune system working for as long as possible.
- Continuing to practice unsafe sex or needle sharing can cause re-infections that may make HIV disease worse and cause symptoms to appear sooner.
- Practicing safer sex and not sharing needles are essential to protect one’s health and one’s partner’s health.
- Partners also should be tested for HIV infection.

Ryan, C., & Futterman, D. (1998). *Lesbian and gay youth care and counseling*. New York: Columbia University Press. ©1998 by Ryan & Futterman. Reprinted with permission.