

HIV/AIDS AND TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS



Tool 8.11 Overview of HIV/AIDS

Overview

This tool provides an overview of the issue of HIV/AIDS and flags the risk it poses to potential and actual victims of trafficking.

Because of the clandestine nature of the crime of trafficking in persons, there is inadequate information about its relationship with HIV/AIDS. In order to prevent the transmission of HIV in the context of trafficking for sexual exploitation, we must proceed on the assumption that people trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation are exposed to the risk of HIV infection.

The key points which lead to this conclusion are that:

- Populations involved in risky sexual behaviour are more likely to become infected with HIV
- People vulnerable to human trafficking are also at elevated risk of HIV
- The purposes of trafficking vary, but all trafficked persons are vulnerable to HIV for similar reasons, which can include:

Unsafe sex with multiple partners

Injecting drug use (voluntary or forced)

Self-harm, body piercing and/or tattooing

Unsafe medical and/or surgical treatment (including during childbirth and voluntary or forced termination of pregnancy in unsanitary conditions, by unqualified practitioners, using unsterilized equipment)

Services and information aimed at preventing HIV/AIDS often do not reach trafficked persons. Therefore, in order to reduce the vulnerability of victims of trafficking to HIV infection, it is necessary to learn:

- How to reach vulnerable people
- The precise nature of their HIV risks
- What HIV services are required
- How services may be delivered to them

What is HIV?

- HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus
- HIV is present in bodily fluids of infected persons, including semen, vaginal fluid and blood
- HIV can be transmitted sexually and through blood exchange between people
- People infected with HIV remain infectious for life—even when they look and feel healthy they can transmit the virus to others
- There is no cure or vaccine for HIV

What is AIDS?

- AIDS stands for acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
- AIDS is a group of diseases that can result from infection with HIV
- HIV damages the body's immune system, which normally provides protection from infections
- Most people with HIV eventually develop AIDS, but a person may be infected with HIV for many years before the immune system is so weakened that it cannot fight off infections as it used to

Who can become infected by HIV?

- Anyone can become infected with HIV—the virus that causes AIDS—so everyone needs to know how to protect himself or herself
- More and more people are becoming infected with HIV

How can a person become infected with HIV?

- Through unprotected sex with someone who is infected
- Through injections (e.g. using a syringe already used by another person) and transfusions of contaminated blood or blood products
- Infected pregnant women can pass HIV to their babies during pregnancy, delivery or breastfeeding
- Through use of non-sterile cutting instruments, such as needles, knives and razors

HIV cannot be transmitted through everyday contact with infected people

- It **cannot** be transmitted through shaking hands or hugging, or by sharing the same toilet or shower, household items, telephones, swimming pools or clothing with someone who is infected with HIV
- It **cannot** be transmitted through sweat, tears, sneezes, coughs or urine
- It **cannot** be transmitted through insect bites (such as mosquito bites)



Source: Chapter 5, section 8 of *The IOM Handbook on Direct Assistance for Victims of Trafficking*, available at:

www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/cache/offonce/pid/1674?entryId=13452

Recommended resource

The Journal of the American Medical Association

In 2007, a study was published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* on HIV prevalence in repatriated Nepalese girls and women trafficked into the sex industry. This comprehensive study—the first of its kind—found that one third of them tested positive for HIV and almost two thirds of people trafficked prior to the age of 15 tested HIV-positive.



“HIV prevalence and predictors of infection in sex-trafficked Nepalese girls and women”, by Jay G. Silverman and others, in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, vol. 298, No. 5 (2007), is available at:

www.jama.com