

Children

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This factsheet provides some practical information that you might find useful if you are the parent or carer of an HIV-positive child.

With the right treatment and care, children with HIV can live well and thrive. It's important for your child's health that he or she attends a clinic regularly, for health monitoring and treatment.

It's also important that you receive the support you need, whether from family and friends, other families affected by HIV, or professionals at your child's clinic or at an HIV organisation. All parents need support from time to time and there may sometimes be specific situations related to HIV that you would find it helpful to talk to someone about, such as talking to your child about HIV, helping them to take medicines or taking them out of school for hospital appointments.

Answering questions

Providing your child with information about HIV won't be a one-off event. It is much more likely that you'll need to provide information about their health over several years.

Even very young children will probably want to know why they need to go to the hospital, see a doctor, or take medicines.

To start off with, you might not need to mention HIV when answering questions. Talking about 'goodies' or 'baddies' in the blood might allow you to talk truthfully about health and illness if you don't want to mention HIV.

The healthcare team at your child's HIV clinic will have experience of working with children of all ages and should be able to give you advice and support in talking to your child about his or her health.

When should I tell my child he/she has HIV?

Every child is different and your family's circumstances and needs may not be the same as someone else's.

For many children, it is helpful to build up knowledge over time. Together with the healthcare team, you could make a plan of information to give your child over time, starting with teaching him or her about more general health issues so they understand what is happening to them when they visit the clinic.

It may sound obvious, but as well as talking to your child, it is important to listen to them. He or she may have concerns or questions that you didn't anticipate.

As a general rule it is a good idea for a child to know that they have HIV before they go to secondary school. This means that they have time to adjust to the information and understand what it means for them before they reach adolescence.

If you have concerns, questions or worries, it's a good idea to talk to someone at your child's HIV clinic. Healthcare staff can support you in talking to your child.

Telling people your child has HIV

You don't have to tell anybody that you or your child has HIV. But, being realistic, you'll have to let doctors and other healthcare staff know so that you can get the best treatment for yourself and your child.

It's important to think about who else you might want to know. And think what their reaction might be.

If you don't want to mention HIV you could use a term such as 'chronic viral illness'. But some people might ask questions about the nature of this illness.

It is possible, even likely, that you or your child will be asked by friends about visits to the doctor, illness or the reason why medicines are taken. Try and think of some answers in advance.

Specialist care

HIV treatment and care for children is often provided at specialist children's HIV clinics. These are sometimes called paediatric HIV clinics. The doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other healthcare staff at these clinics are very skilled at providing HIV treatment and care to children.

HIV treatment works well in children. Many children who were born with HIV are now young adults and, with the right treatment and care, children with HIV can live a long and healthy life. Some HIV treatment centres now provide special clinics for teenagers. These clinics provide an opportunity to transfer care from paediatric doctors to doctors who are expert in the care of HIV in adults.

They also give teenagers a chance to think about living with HIV as an adult. Counsellors are also available to help your child talk about their feelings.

You can find out more about HIV treatment in our factsheet *Treatment in children*, available on our website at www.aidsmap.com/factsheets.

Help and support

Your HIV clinic or local council may have a social worker who is experienced in working with families and HIV-positive children.

You can find your local HIV clinic by searching in our online e-atlas at www.aidsmap.com/e-atlas.

As well as having specialist doctors, children's HIV clinics have nurses, pharmacists, counsellors and psychologists who can help HIV-positive children and their families.

There's a national charity in the UK that provides support to families, children and teenagers affected by HIV. It's called Body and Soul and they can be contacted on 020 7923 6880. Their website is www.bodyandsoulcharity.org.

Specialist HIV doctors have their own organisation called the Children's HIV Association (CHIVA). Their website is www.chiva.org.uk and it has a lot of useful information on HIV treatment for children and issues such as taking medicines and day-to-day life with HIV. There is a section written for parents and a separate secure website for young people.