

# GET THE FACTS

Improve School Climate to Increase LGBT Students' Well-Being and Reduce HIV/AIDS Risk

In the United States, too many young people are at risk for HIV infection. Young gay and bisexual men of color and transgender women have been particularly impacted by HIV in recent years.

We know that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth commonly experience bullying and harassment in their schools, and these experiences are linked to coping behaviors that increase risk for HIV infection, including substance use and high-risk sexual behavior.<sup>1</sup>

Educators have an important role in helping to mitigate these risks by providing comprehensive sexuality education, supporting LGBT students and helping to make their schools safer and more affirming.

**FACT: Many LGBT youth are at higher risk for HIV infection — particularly youth of color and transgender youth.**

In 2010, young men (ages 13-24) who have sex with men (MSM) accounted for **19%** of all new HIV infections and **30%** of new infections among all MSM.<sup>2</sup>

## LIFETIME RISK OF HIV DIAGNOSIS BY RACE<sup>3</sup>

	MSM	Transwomen
White	1 in <b>6</b>	1 in <b>6</b>
Hispanic	1 in <b>5</b>	1 in <b>3-6</b>
Black/African American	1 in <b>3</b>	1 in <b>2</b>

**FACT: Schools are unsafe and unwelcoming for most LGBT students.**<sup>4</sup>

According to GLSEN's 2013 *National School Climate Survey*:

**85%** of LGBT students were verbally harassed in the past year.

**30%** of LGBT students missed at least one day of school in the last month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.

**56%** students experienced discriminatory school policies and practices.

LGBT students of color, transgender students, LGBT students in rural communities, and those living in the South tend to face more hostile school climates.

**Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)**, is a lot like other viruses.

A notable difference, however, is that over time, a person's immune system can clear out most viruses. With HIV, this is not the case, and a person's immune system cannot get rid of it. This means that once infected with HIV, a person will live with the virus for life.<sup>5</sup>

HIV attacks a body's CD4 cells, or T-cells, a key part of the immune system. Overtime, HIV can destroy so many T-cells that a body is unable to fight off other diseases and infections. At this stage, HIV infection can lead to Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). With advances in science, not everyone living with HIV will progress to AIDS, and proper treatment, called antiretroviral therapy (ART), helps control the virus, allowing people to live longer, healthier lives, and reduce the risk of transmitting the virus to others.

**FACT: For LGBT students, anti-LGBT discrimination and victimization in school can lead to:**<sup>4</sup>

- ↑ Higher rates of depression.
- ↓ Lower self-esteem.
- ↑ Increased absences from school.
- ↓ Lower GPAs.
- ↓ Lower educational aspirations.
- ↓ Feeling less connected to the school community.

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**FACT:** You can improve the health and well-being of LGBT students in your school.

## Be a visible and supportive ally to LGBT students

by listening to them, affirming their identities, intervening in name-calling and bullying, posting GLSEN Safe Space stickers/posters, and ensuring access to local LGBT and HIV/AIDS resources. Make your classroom a place where all students can reach their full potential.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Safe Space stickers or poster help LGBT students identify supportive educators and feel more comfortable talking to school staff about LGBT issues.<sup>4</sup>

## Ensure access to comprehensive sexuality education

that is inclusive of and relevant to LGBT students. Lessons should be developmentally appropriate, evidence-based, medically accurate, and create space for honest discussions of sexual orientation and gender identity. Heterosexuality should not be assumed and attention must be paid to transgender students and their concerns.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Comprehensive sex education may help reduce high-risk sexual behaviors in youth.

## Support your school's Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA)

a place where LGBT students have safe spaces to find friends and allies and build leadership skills. Attend a GSA meeting, invite members to speak in your classroom or be an official advisor for the club.

### DID YOU KNOW?

LGBT students with GSAs experience less victimization and feel more connected to their school communities.<sup>4</sup>

## Implement comprehensive and LGBT-inclusive policies

so all students are guaranteed safe and affirming learning environments, regardless of actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, or HIV status. It is important to pay particular attention to the rights and needs of transgender and gender nonconforming students, who face high levels of victimization and discrimination at school.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Anti-bullying policies that specifically list sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, along with other protected categories are most effective at improving the experiences of LGBT students.<sup>4</sup>

## Keep Learning

about the experiences of LGBT students and students whose lives are impacted by HIV/AIDS.

### DID YOU KNOW?

You can visit [glsen.org/health](http://glsen.org/health) and [aidsunited.org](http://aidsunited.org) for additional information and resources.

<sup>1</sup> GLBTA Youth. *Advocates for Youth*, 2005. Available at: <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/storage/advfy/documents/fsqblt.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Estimated HIV incidence in the United States, 2007–2010*. HIV Surveillance Supplemental Report 2012;17 (No. 4). [cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/statistics\\_hsr\\_vol\\_17\\_no\\_4.pdf](http://cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/statistics_hsr_vol_17_no_4.pdf). Published December 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Hall et al. *JAIDS*. 2008; 49: 294-297; *MMWR*, 2011; *Rapues, AJPH*, 2013; *Herbst, AIDS Behav*, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Palmer, N. A., & Boesen, M. J. (2014). *The 2013 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools*. New York: GLSEN.

<sup>5</sup> What Is HIV/AIDS? *AIDS.gov*, 2014. Available at: <http://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/hiv-aids-101/what-is-hiv-aids/>