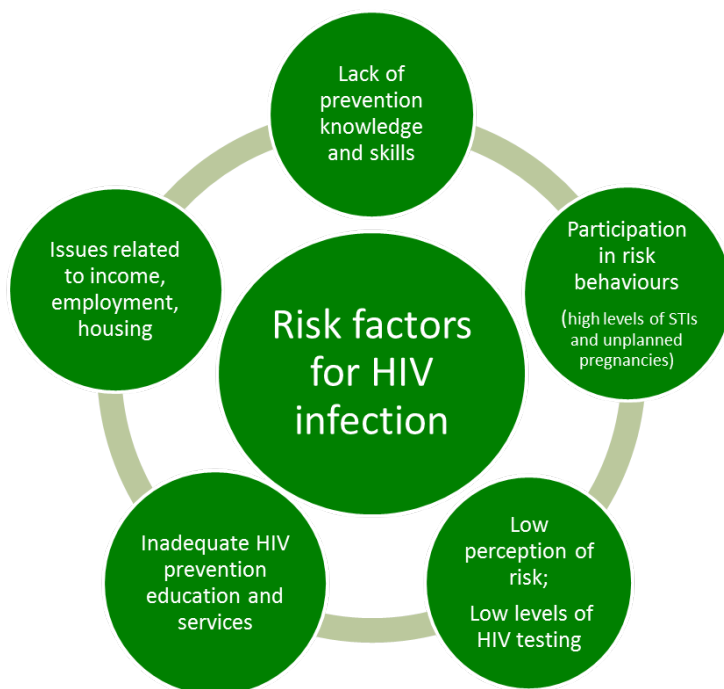


## HIV Prevention in Saskatchewan Adolescents



### Why is HIV prevention important for Saskatchewan adolescents?



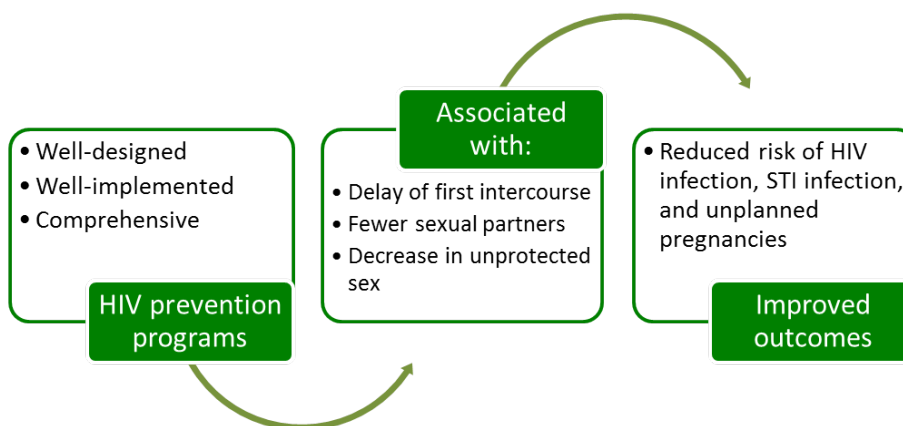
The risk factors highlighted here, along with the high rates of HIV in Saskatchewan, suggest that many adolescents may be at risk of HIV infection.

Research also suggests that many cases of HIV that are identified among people in their 20s and early 30s may have been acquired during adolescence.

Many of the behaviours that pose a risk of HIV infection (e.g., unprotected sex and unsafe substance use) start to emerge during adolescence, making this time period a vital focus for prevention efforts.

Today's adolescents have grown up in a world with HIV, but many still lack the knowledge and skills necessary to prevent HIV infection.

But there is good news...



### Recommendations for Adolescent HIV Prevention Programs:

- ✓ provide **comprehensive, holistic HIV prevention programs** that include:
  - accurate, age-appropriate information about HIV and how to prevent it; information about safer sex; and information on related health issues
  - skills-building components (e.g., sex refusal, resisting peer pressure, communicating with sexual partners, negotiation skills, and using condoms correctly)
  - youth-friendly services including reproductive health services, non-judgemental risk counselling, HIV and STI testing, and access to contraception
  - a safe and supportive environment
- ✓ **target young adolescents** before they become sexually active or involved with alcohol and drugs, and provide ongoing information and training
- ✓ **integrate services**, where sexual health information and services are provided alongside other healthcare and social services (e.g., integrate HIV prevention information into broader, community-based interventions and programs for adolescents and youth, like youth drop-in centres)

### Other factors for success:

- ✓ have trained instructors who are knowledgeable and comfortable with the topic area
- ✓ provide programs that are culturally, age, and gender appropriate to address the diverse needs of adolescents (include discussions about gender and sexual diversity to reduce HIV risk and stigma)
- ✓ involve parents, peers, youth-serving organizations, and health organizations
- ✓ address the social determinants of health whenever possible, particularly when working with high risk adolescents for whom HIV prevention is less important than meeting their daily needs

## Important Considerations

- The Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education (PHAC, 2008) define sexual health education as “equipping individuals, couples, families, and communities with the **information**, **motivation**, and **behavioural skills** needed to enhance sexual health and avoid negative sexual health outcomes” (p. 5).

### Three Prerequisites for HIV Prevention Behaviour

1. **Information** that is directly relevant to HIV transmission and prevention and is easy to apply in an individual’s own life
  2. **Personal motivation** toward HIV prevention and **social motivation** (i.e., perceived social support for HIV preventive behaviours) in order to act on the information
  3. **Behavioural skills** (practice and role-play are necessary) for actually doing the HIV preventive acts
- As adolescents are not a homogenous group, successful programs often include adolescents from the target population in the planning, implementing, and monitoring of HIV prevention programs to ensure that these programs are tailored to their needs (youth engagement).
  - Schools may be the most cost-effective, efficient, universal delivery method for providing HIV prevention and sexual health information.
  - Digital technology has the potential to reach a large number of youth about a range of sexual health topics, including HIV (e.g., websites, social media, downloadable apps, and text messages for sharing information; video-clips for skills-building; games focused on behaviour change).

## Conclusion

Providing adolescents with education, skills-building opportunities, and appropriate services enables them to make healthier choices and reduces the likelihood of adolescents engaging in high-risk behaviours; thereby reducing their risk of HIV, other STIs, and unplanned pregnancies.



**For more detailed information**, including a full list of references, please refer to the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute’s literature review titled “Prevention of HIV Infection in Adolescents”.

This literature review is available from the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute’s website at

<http://skprevention.ca/resource-catalogue/sexual-health/prevention-of-hiv-infection-in-adolescents/>.