

Awareness of HIV/AIDS among adolescents



India, in 2017, had an estimated adult (15–49 years) HIV prevalence of 0.22 percent (0.16–0.30%) where 31 percent of the AIDS burden was among those in ages 15–19 years.¹ Physiologically, young people are more vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV, than adults, and girls are more vulnerable than boys. Gender imbalances, societal norms, and economic dependence contribute to this risk. Lack of access to correct information, tendency to experiment, and an environment where discussing issues around sexuality is taboo adds to their vulnerability.

The two waves of UDAYA survey, completed in 2015–16 and 2018–19, explored adolescents' awareness of infections that are transmitted through sexual contact, including HIV/AIDS. Adolescents were asked whether they had heard about HIV/AIDS, and subsequently, in order to assess their comprehensive awareness of HIV/AIDS, a few questions were posed on misconceptions and preventive methods regarding HIV/AIDS.

Our findings from the 2015–16 survey show that adolescents had limited awareness of HIV/AIDS. Younger adolescents were less likely than older adolescents to have heard about HIV/AIDS in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh—11 percent of younger boys versus 55 percent of older boys, and seven percent of younger girls versus 34 percent of unmarried older adolescent girls and 26 percent of married older adolescent girls. These percentages also show that differences by sex were wide for older adolescents, among whom boys were more likely than girls to have heard of HIV/AIDS. Differences by sex among adolescents who had heard about HIV/AIDS in these two states were particularly marked in urban areas than in rural areas.

Furthermore, only two percent of younger adolescent boys and girls reported comprehensive awareness of HIV/AIDS. Differences by sex were notable among older adolescents,

with 15 percent of boys compared with five percent of girls reporting comprehensive awareness of HIV/AIDS. Comprehensive awareness of HIV/AIDS increased with age, education, household wealth status, residence, and mother's education among older adolescent boys and girls. Thus, the comprehensive awareness of HIV/AIDS was three percent among older boys with no formal education compared with 39 percent among those with 12 or more years of education. The corresponding percentages among older girls were less than one percent and 15–17.

The findings from the second wave of UDAYA survey show that there is an increase in percentage of boys and girls across both states who have heard about HIV/AIDS, but there is minimal increase in comprehensive awareness of HIV/AIDS among all categories of respondents.

Our findings underline that reaching youngsters at an impressionable age before they become sexually active and providing accurate information on sexual and reproductive matters are critical for enabling adolescents to take informed decisions regarding important health issues.



¹India HIV estimations: Technical report (2017). National AIDS Control Organization and ICMR-National Institute of Medical Statistics; Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India.

Enable adolescents to protect themselves and become advocates for HIV prevention