



University of the Witwatersrand

WITS RHI



How HIV Affects Learning in Children:
Critical Information for those working with Children

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- Introduction
- Brief introduction to HIV and its prevalence among children.
- Explain how HIV affects learning
- Provide strategies for support

INTRODUCTION



- ❑ **HIV** is a virus that causes AIDS
 - Human (found in human beings)
 - Immuno-deficiency (lowers immunity)
 - Virus (germ/ micro-organism)
- ❑ **HIV** is a virus known to be the cause of **AIDS**. Once it has entered the body (HIV infection)
- ❑ There are two major types of the human immunodeficiency virus, **HIV-1** and **HIV-2**. As much as they are alike, they have subtle differences.
- ❑ Of the two, HIV 1 is the more aggressive and HIV 2 is not easily transmitted.

INTRODUCTION...

AIDS

- **Acquired** - Is a condition that is only contracted as it cannot be inherited or transmitted through the genes
- **Immune** - Affects the body's immune system, the part of the body that fights off diseases (*protection against disease*)
- **Deficiency** - Makes the immune system stop working properly
- **Syndrome** - It is a collection of several different symptoms and opportunistic diseases

Difference between HIV and people living with AIDS

- Not everyone who is infected with HIV has AIDS but everyone who develops AIDS is infected with HIV
- AIDS is the result of progression of HIV infection.
- AIDS is the advanced stage of HIV infection and is often associated with a group of diseases acquired because of a weakened immune system (Body's Defence).

INTRODUCTION...

ART or ARV's

- Antiretroviral or Antiretroviral Therapy (Can be used interchangeably), refers to a class of medications used to treat retroviral infections, most notably HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus).
- ARVs, work by interfering with the replication cycle of the virus, preventing it from multiplying and damaging the body's immune system.
- While ARVs don't cure HIV, they allow people with HIV to live longer, healthier lives by controlling the virus and preventing the development of AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome).
- ARVs can also be used to prevent HIV infection, either as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) or post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP).
- Starting ART early and adhering to the treatment is crucial maintaining a healthy immune system and prevent disease progression.

Understanding HIV in Children in South Africa

Prevalence: An estimated 270,000 children aged 0-14 are living with HIV in South Africa.

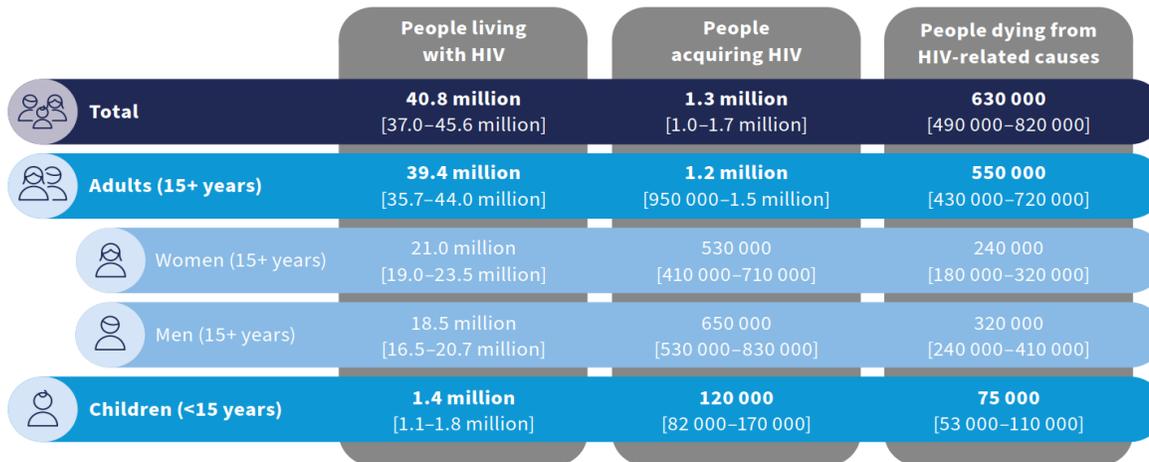
New Infections: Approximately 10,000 children are newly infected each year.

AIDS-related Deaths: Approximately 2,100 children die from AIDS-related illnesses annually.

Mother-to-Child Transmission (MTCT): This is the main route of HIV transmission to children, with rates significantly reduced due to interventions like [antiretroviral therapy \(ART\)](#).

Geographic Variation: HIV prevalence varies across provinces, with some showing greater declines in pediatric HIV rates than others.

Summary of the global HIV epidemic, 2024



Note: The 2024 estimates were made before the implementation of cuts to foreign aid.

Source: UNAIDS/WHO estimates, 2025.

https://en.hesperian.org/hhg/Helping_Children_Live_with_HIV:HIV_affects_a_child%E2%80%99s_development_and_abilities

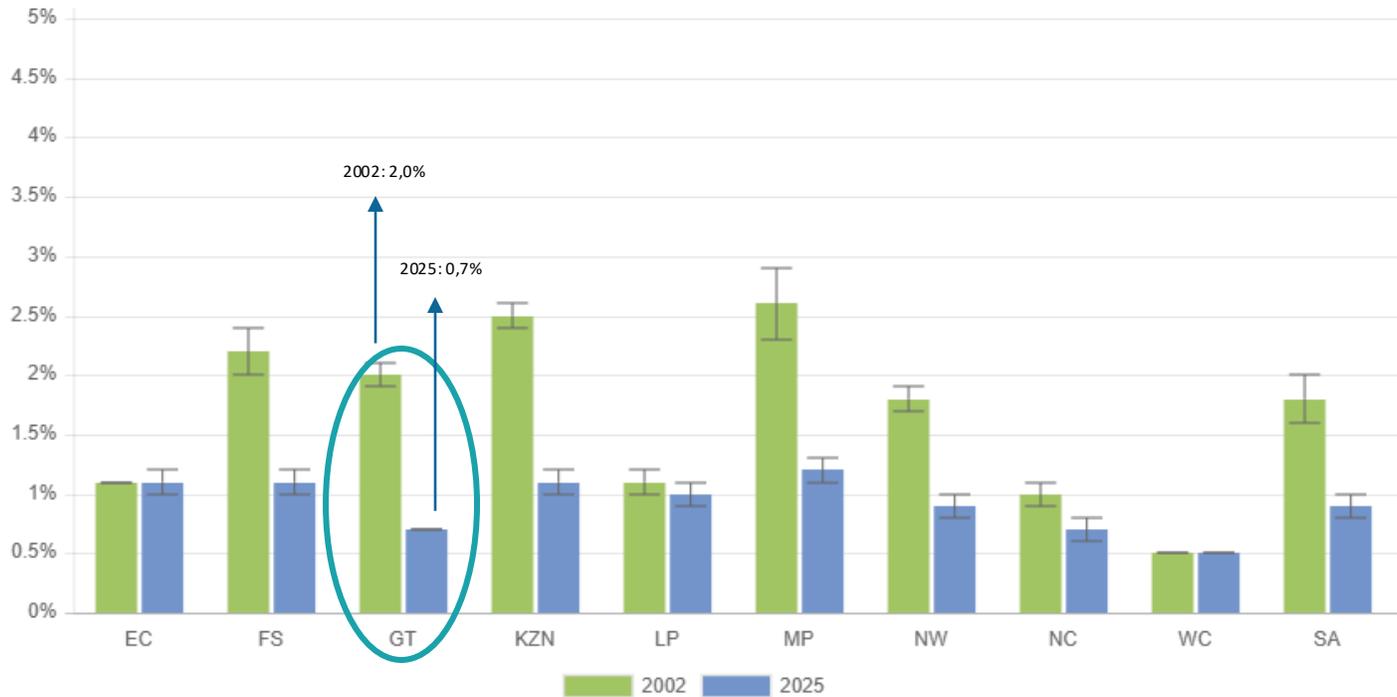
<https://hsr.c.ac.za/special-projects/sabssm-survey-series/sabssm-vi-provincial-dialogue-gauteng-province-media-pack/>

<http://childrencount.uct.ac.za/indicator.php?domain=5&indicator=29>

[https://cdn.who.int/media/images/default-source/headquarters/teams/uhc---communicable-noncommunicable-diseases-\(ucn\)/global-hiv-hepatitis-and-stis-programmes-\(hhs\)/summary-of-the-global-hiv-epidemic--2024.png?sfvrsn=50c850cb_3](https://cdn.who.int/media/images/default-source/headquarters/teams/uhc---communicable-noncommunicable-diseases-(ucn)/global-hiv-hepatitis-and-stis-programmes-(hhs)/summary-of-the-global-hiv-epidemic--2024.png?sfvrsn=50c850cb_3)

Understanding HIV in Children in South Africa

In Gauteng, the number of children (under 15 years) living with HIV is estimated to be around 14,800, according to a report from May 2022. Gauteng also has a lower ART coverage for this age group compared to the national average, with approximately 44% of children on antiretroviral therapy, compared to the national average of 51%. This means that a significant number of children in Gauteng living with HIV are not receiving the necessary treatment.



What Does this Mean for the child

On ART

- Children who are HIV positive can live healthy lives with the support of [antiretroviral therapy \(ART\)](#). This involves taking medication daily, that assists to control the virus and keep the child healthy.
- Early initiation of ART is crucial, especially for children, as it can significantly reduce the risk of death and improve long-term outcomes.
- **Reduced mortality:** Starting ART early significantly reduces the risk of mortality in HIV-infected children.
- **Improved immune function:** ART helps improve the immune function of children with HIV.
- **Reduced risk of [opportunistic infections](#):** By controlling the virus, ART helps reduce the risk of opportunistic infections such as TB and Pneumonia

Not on ART

- Not being on antiretroviral therapy (ART) significantly increases the risk of developmental delays and neurological problems, including impaired cognitive and motor functioning for the child.
- **Developmental Delays:**
 - These include delays in milestones like walking, talking, sight and hearing.
- **Neurological Issues:**
 - The child may experience impaired cognitive functioning,
 - Including a decline in the child's ability to think, **learn**, and remember.
- **Brain Damage:**
 - HIV can cause progressive brain damage by directly infecting brain cells
 - This can lead to inflammation and damage, particularly in areas involved in learning and information processing.
 - Especially in children who are not treated with ART.

Other Things To Consider

Stigma: This can manifest as

- Discrimination
- Bullying
- Social isolation

Isolation

- Often related to stigma and Mental health, isolation limits opportunities for peer support and creates feelings of loneliness and exclusion.

Mental Health

- Children living with HIV, face higher risk of depression and anxiety, which can further impact learning.

Role of Educators



Creating an Enabling and Supportive Environment:

- Create an inclusive and supportive classroom atmosphere.
- Promotion of understanding and empathy amongst learners
- Provision of prevention education
- Connecting learners to the necessary support services (recognition and referral) this may include signs of cognitive and emotional difficulties

Provision of academic support:

- Empower students with information about HIV to reduce stigma and promote understanding.
- Assist learners catch up on missed schoolwork
- Provide flexible learning arrangements and
- Facilitate peer support

Examples include

- Allowing learners to sit near the door for easy access to the restroom, or allowing them to take textbooks home.
- Providing extra time for assignments or tests for learners who need it.
- **Organizing peer support groups for learners affected by HIV.**
- **Inviting guest speakers to talk about HIV in a sensitive and informative way.**
- **Working closely with School Health nurses to ensure learners have access to necessary healthcare services.**

Uphold The Rights Of Learners

Role of Learner Support Agents and Community Support Agents

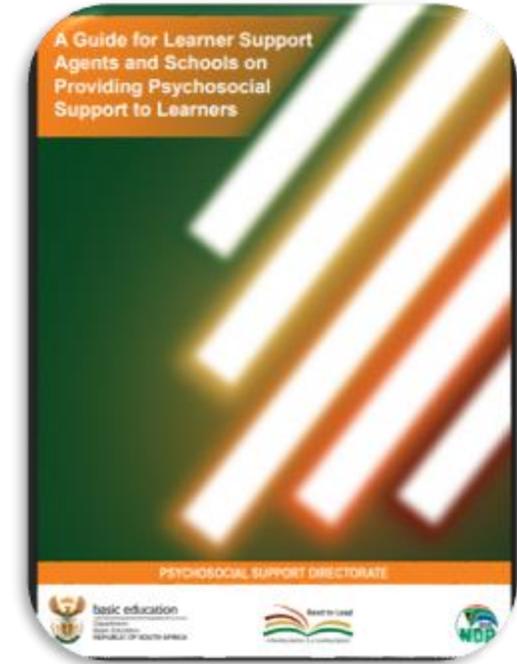
With the support of the School Based Support Teams, LSAs/CSAs play a crucial role in:

Direct Support and Care:

- **Identifying and Supporting Vulnerable Learners:** and work with the [School-Based Support Team \(SBST\)](#) to link them to the appropriate support services.
- **Facilitating Access to Resources:** connect learners with essential resources like healthcare services, social support, and food programs.

Education and Awareness

- **Implementing Life Skills Programs:** Delivering life skills programs that address HIV/AIDS prevention, healthy lifestyles, and other relevant topics such as prevention of teenage pregnancy.
- **Promoting a Caring School Environment:** Create a supportive and inclusive environment where learners feel safe to learn and thrive.
- **Supporting Peer Education:** May help establish and support peer education programs, empowering learners to support each other.



Role of Learner Support Agents and Community Support Agents

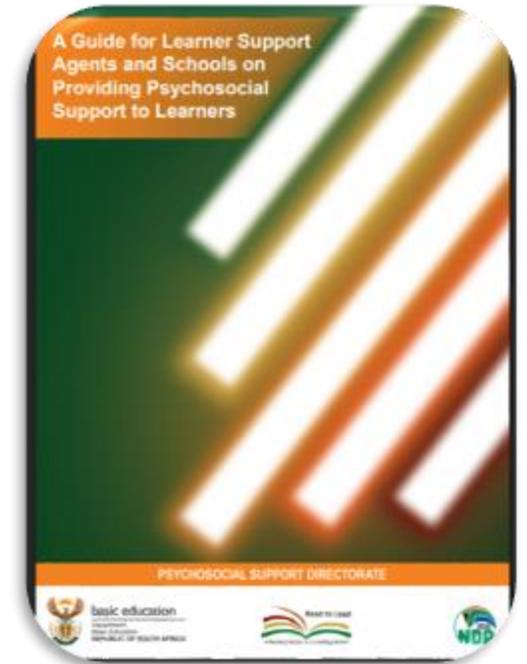
Collaboration and Networking

Working with SBSTs:

- Collaborate with the school's SBST to ensure a coordinated approach to learner support.

Engaging with Stakeholders: Establish and maintain relationships with local stakeholders, including;

- Healthcare providers,
- Social workers, and
- Community organizations to facilitate access to comprehensive support.



Summary: HIV and Learning in Children

HIV Overview:

- A virus that weakens the immune system, leading to AIDS.
- Managed with Antiretroviral Therapy (ART).

Prevalence in South Africa:

- ~270,000 children (0–14) living with HIV in South Africa;
- Gauteng has ~14,800 with lower ART coverage.

Impact on Development:

- Neurocognitive issues: memory, concentration, motor skills.
- Developmental delays and neurological damage if untreated.

Educational Challenges:

- Lower enrollment, retention, and academic performance.
- Psychosocial effects: stigma, isolation, depression, anxiety.

Call to Action

Support Strategies

In the Classroom:

- Create inclusive, stigma-free environments.
- Use **Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)** tailored to each child's needs.
- Provide **accommodations**: extra time, note-taking help, modified tasks to support learning.

Emotional & Psychological Support:

- Offer **counseling services** to address trauma, anxiety, and depression.
- Promote peer support and social inclusion.

Role of Educators & Support Agents:

- Teachers: Identify learning/emotional difficulties and refer for help.
- Learner Support Agents: Conduct vulnerability screenings, run awareness workshops, and engage families.

Healthcare Collaboration:

- Ensure regular medical check-ups and ART adherence.
- Maintain communication between schools and healthcare providers.

Thank You

