



World AIDS Day Reminder: Our Kids Deserve the Truth About Sex and HIV Prevention

World AIDS Day call for honest, comprehensive sex ed to protect youth amid rising HIV diagnoses and threatened prevention funding.

December 1, 2025 By [Tom Duane](#)

When I was still in office, I could count on one hand the number of times a school would have me come in to talk to students. One of those rare occasions was on World AIDS Day to talk about HIV. For some of those students, that was the only HIV awareness education they ever received. It may also have been the only sex education they got, and it was from me! Can you imagine? Some big white guy telling them about HIV and how to prevent AIDS.

I'm sure that the school administrators were terrified that I'd encourage a lot of premarital sex, but my talk centered on the seriousness of sex between two people. The decision for a young person to engage in sexual activity is always a big one, but during the AIDS crisis, it was life and death.

I was glad to be able to give the kids some information, prevention strategies—condoms and abstinence were the only tools in the kit at the time— that could keep them safe from HIV infection. And as a bonus, those same tools would keep them safe from other STIs and unwanted pregnancy.

Education was vital when it comes to HIV prevention during the AIDS crisis, and it's still sorely needed for our young people today. According to the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), in 2022, 19% of new HIV diagnoses were among young people aged 13-24.

The Guttmacher Institute reports that 41 states require sex education, HIV education, or both be taught in schools. (Why it's not all 50 is beyond me.) Forty-three states teach and promote abstinence. Only 26 states require that sex education and HIV education be medically accurate. When it comes to gender identity, only 21 states include sexual and gender expression in their curriculum: 8 states teach about the spectrum of sexualities and gender identities; 7 states teach that any gender or sexual identity that differs from cisgender and heterosexual is unacceptable, shameful, or illegal; 10 states offer sexual and HIV education only to older students, or prohibit such teaching in the classrooms altogether. Most states require a parent's permission for such instruction, and parents can even opt out of their child receiving sex and HIV education.

Shocking that the numbers vary so wildly when it comes to sex education, yet, adolescents who receive comprehensive sex education are 50% less likely to engage in early sexual activity than those who receive abstinence-only education. Globally, the average age that young people first engage in intercourse after having comprehensive sex education is generally higher, around 17. Moreover, comprehensive sex education has been proven to give young people a better sense of themselves and more consideration for others.

I've never understood why some parents have such hang-ups when it comes to sex education in schools. I know they're afraid that their little darlings might be tempted to indulge by the mention of the word sex, but kids today have access to more information than ever. Kids, just like adults, are tempted all the time. It's always been my belief that teaching young people about their bodies and the choices they have only leads to more responsible outcomes, less HIV and STI transmissions, less unwanted pregnancy.

This World AIDS Day, I want you to think of our young people, the future of our country. Think about what you want for them, for their futures. How important it is for them to know how to mitigate risks when it comes to sexual decisions and HIV.

And remember that the current Trump administration's proposed cuts to HIV education, prevention and care in the U.S. include eliminating funding for the [CDC's HIV prevention programs](#), slashing budgets for the [Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program](#), and drastically reducing support for programs at HIV/AIDS service organizations across the country. These proposed cuts are projected to result in an increase in new HIV infections, sickness, and deaths around the world.

And frighteningly, right here at home, too.