

HIV discussion statements

Introduction

These statements are a good way of starting a study of AIDS. They have proved very effective in stimulating interest and discussion. Their use may lead on to a more open discussion and information sharing session in some groups.

The activity

Give out the set of statements and tell students to quickly decide on their answers individually, only about 5 minutes for this. Then ask them to discuss the statements in pairs and come up with agreed answers. This will take about 15 - 20 minutes if they really discuss ideas.

Check answers to the factual statements 1 - 5 by a show of hands on each. Allow time for students to raise issues and uncertainties.

Get feedback from each pair on their answers to the controversial issues 6 - 12 and discuss them with the whole class. This will often take at least half an hour because they will not all agree. It also allows students to raise other questions they may have about AIDS.

The comments provide relevant facts and some ideas for discussion points. The exercise is about developing discussion skills as well as about AIDS. However it could be followed up for homework with a short written piece giving their opinion on one of the issues.

References

Specification 3.1.2
Further information can be found on <http://www.avert.org>

Science Explanations

Ae An individual can be infected by microbes in several ways which include: directly from an infected person, from a contaminated environment including air and water, or via an insect vector. The route of transmission depends on the microbes.

Af Antibiotics are chemicals which kill or inhibit the growth of certain bacteria or fungi. They can be used to treat infections by these organisms. They have no effect on viruses. However, over a period of time the bacteria or fungi become resistant to an antibiotic. These resistant individuals then reproduce, resulting in resistant strains of microbes.

How Science Works

Hb Decision makers aim to make evidence based decisions, taking into account factors that include: technical feasibility, benefits expected, economic cost, risks to human health and wellbeing, risks to the environment.

Hf Decision makers are influenced by the mass media, by special interest groups and by public opinion as well as by expert evidence. Decisions about science and technology may be influenced by decision makers' prior beliefs or vested interests, which can affect their interpretation and evaluation of the evidence.

Hg Many decisions about new technologies involve economic considerations, and raise social and political issues.

	Statements	Agree	Don't know	Disagree	Comment
1	HIV and AIDS mean the same thing.				HIV is the name of the virus. The disease is described as AIDS when major symptoms appear.
2	HIV cannot be transmitted by kissing.				Theoretically possible as there are very small amounts of the virus in saliva. In practice it has never been found to happen.
3	AIDS mainly affects gay men.				This is not true, in most parts of the world apart from the US and Western Europe most cases are heterosexual.
4	New combinations of drugs mean that AIDS is no longer fatal.				People live many years longer on the drugs, though the side effects of the drugs do cause problems. Development of resistance means that eventually the disease may still prove fatal.
5	The HIV virus itself does not kill people.				This is true. The virus reproduces in and destroys the immune system. This means other infections cannot be resisted by the body and kill the patient.
6	The HIV virus originated in Africa, from contact between humans and monkeys.				This is the widely accepted theory, supported by DNA testing.
7	HIV positive people should be prosecuted if they fail to tell any sexual partner of their HIV status.				People have been prosecuted, but AIDS support groups argue that safe sex is the responsibility of both partners, and that AIDS should not be treated differently from other diseases like TB.
8	All pregnant women should be tested for HIV whether they want to or not, to help prevent transmission to children.				Medication during pregnancy and delivery greatly reduces the risk of mother to child transmission. Others argue that the mother must have the autonomy to decide. In almost all countries the mother has the right to opt out but few do.
9	It is reasonable that HIV positive people should not be able to get life insurance or mortgages.				Even with drugs their life expectancy is likely to be reduced, costing the insurance company more. However not being able to buy a house can make life even more difficult.
10	People who are HIV positive should be forced to tell their employers.				This depends on the nature of the employment. Those who might infect members of the public who use their services, mainly health workers, should disclose. As normal contact carries no risk there is no reason for others to do so.
11	Combination therapy for HIV positive people costs the NHS about £10 000 per person per year. This is an unfair use of scarce NHS resources.				It is expensive but it saves other NHS costs on caring for the person in hospital. It also means that many people with HIV can continue working, supporting families and paying taxes, thus proving cost-effective overall.
12	The government is not doing enough to increase awareness of how to prevent the spread of HIV.				Students will be the best judges of this.

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Read the following statements and discuss them in a small group. You have to decide whether you agree or disagree with each statement. Some are intentionally controversial, some are factual. To encourage you to make up your mind on controversial issues you are only allowed two “don’t know’s” in total. When you have finished you will discuss some of these questions in class.

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11	Combination therapy for HIV positive people costs the NHS about £10 000 per person per year. This is an unfair use of scarce NHS resources			
12	The government is not doing enough to increase awareness of how to prevent the spread of HIV			