



# You Asked...We Answered!

Answers to Questions on HIV and AIDS Asked By Youth in Southern Africa!

## HIV AND AIDS: GET THE FACTS!

# PART(i)

*SAFAIDS*

A Series Compiled by  
Southern Africa HIV/AIDS  
Information Dissemination Service



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Southern Africa HIV/AIDS Information Dissemination Service (SAfAIDS)

You Asked...We Answered!

Answers to Questions on HIV/AIDS Asked By Youth in Southern Africa!  
Part (i)

**HIV AND AIDS: GET THE FACTS!**

A Series Compiled by Southern Africa HIV/AIDS Information Dissemination Service with support from the Netherlands Embassy, Department of International Development UK (DFID), Swedish International Development Agency(SIDA), Humanistic Institute for Cooperation with Development Countries (HIVOS), and Development Cooperation Ireland.

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## Acknowledgements

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SAfAIDS acknowledges the support from its funding partners who include the Netherlands Embassy, Department of International Development UK (DFID), Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), Humanistic Institute for Cooperation with Development Countries (HIVOS) and Development Cooperation Ireland.

## Why have the Booklets?

As youth, YOU are the most important resources in our countries! Your health and well-being will help determine the future of communities and countries in which you live.

You are considered to be an ACTION FORCE, not a target group, and have a special understanding of the health and developmental issues facing you. We recognise that you need to be involved in all aspects of planning activities aimed at your age group, that is why we went to youth to find out what questions you have about your sexuality and HIV and AIDS! Each question you see in this booklet has been asked by young people in workshops and training sessions we have held throughout southern Africa.

It is important that you as young people be given accurate information so that you can enjoy better sexual and reproductive health and know risks you could be taking in your present lifestyle. As a young person you can view these booklets as having been designed to provide you with relevant and important facts that can assist you to:

## Make informed choices in you life

- Be realistic regarding problems which face you and your communities
- Be a role model to other young people, be the potentially powerful influence to other young people/peers
- Have the information to support your initiatives, energy and ideas and organise them into action
- Understand your own behaviours, and those of other young people, which can Put you at risk
- Be interested in doing something about protecting yourself, your friends and families from HIV and AIDS, drug and alcohol abuse, unplanned pregnancies and abortions

## How Can You Use These Booklets?

It is simple to use these booklets. Their layout allows you to choose a topic you may want to know more about from the contents page, and go to that section to see what kind of questions youth have asked about that same topic.

Youth had so many questions about HIV and AIDS, that we have separated the “You Asked... We Answered” into 3 parts:

Part I HIV and AIDS : Get the Facts!

Part II HIV and AIDS : Let's Talk About Sex!

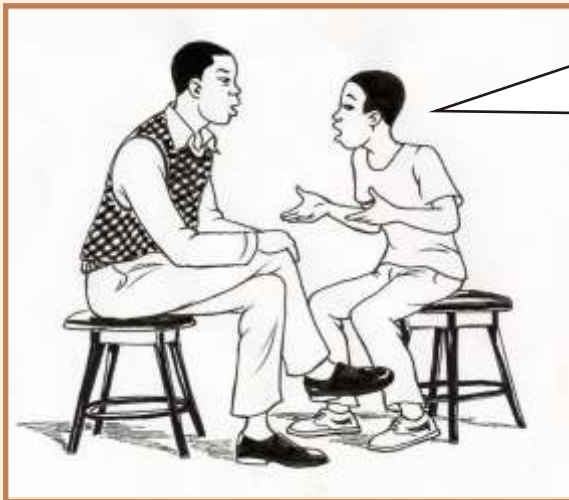
Part III HIV and AIDS : How Can I Make A Difference?

If you find that a question you may have is not listed in Part I, try reading another part of the series and see if you can find it!

These booklets can be read at any stage of your life and at any time. You may use their content during your leisure time, or during your school, religious and social activity. You could also use this booklet to help answer questions and address concerns of other young people you know in your community.

ii

Enjoy discovering the answers to your many questions and continue to search for more answers!



I would rather focus on the prevention, care and support aspects of HIV and AIDS because these elements are crucial to all of our futures!

Remember your health and welfare; the health and welfare of your family, friends, loved ones and community are your responsibility!

# Contents

## HIV AND AIDS - THE BASICS

1. What exactly is HIV?
2. Where did HIV originate from?
3. What is AIDS?
4. What causes AIDS?
5. What are examples of common "opportunistic infections"?

## TRANSMISSION

1. How do you get infected with HIV?
2. What are the signs and symptoms of HIV infection?
3. Are some people more likely to become HIV infected than others?

## STIs and HIV/AIDS

1. What are STIs?
2. How are STIs transmitted?
3. Why am I at risk of getting STIs?
4. How are HIV and STIs related?

## TB and HIV/AIDS

1. What is TB?
2. How is it transmitted?
3. Can TB be cured? If so, then why are so many people with HIV and AIDS dying from it?

## MYTHS - DON'T BELIEVE THE LIES!

1. Is it worth fighting the HI Virus, since we will eventually, all die.
2. Can a person with blood type "O" be infected after having sex with an HIV infected person?
3. Can kissing someone who is HIV positive infect me?
4. Is it true that if you are a virgin you cannot contract HIV the first time you have sex?
5. I also heard that men with HIV can be cured by having sex with virgins, is that true?

## SUMMARY

# HIV - THE BASICS

## 1. What exactly is HIV?

HIV is an abbreviation for Human Immunodeficiency Virus.

H - Human  
I - Immunodeficiency  
V - Virus

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS.

## 2. Where did HIV originate from?

It is unclear where and when the virus first emerged. There is a lot of discussion about the origin of HIV, but no definite answers have been found as yet.

We do know that in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, HIV infection in human beings developed into the epidemic of disease around the world we now refer to as "AIDS". Though the exact origin of HIV has not been discovered, the first cases of AIDS were identified in the United States of America in 1981. But, by looking at stored blood samples from the 1960s and 1970s we now know that HIV started in Central Africa. Often people want to know where HIV came from so that they can blame the source. The desire to blame others for bad things that happen is natural, but does not help to either support those living with HIV or AIDS, or to prevent the spread of the virus.

Should we really be wasting our time on the origins of HIV and AIDS.



I would rather focus on the prevention, care and support aspects of HIV and AIDS because these elements are crucial to all of our futures!

### 3. What is AIDS?

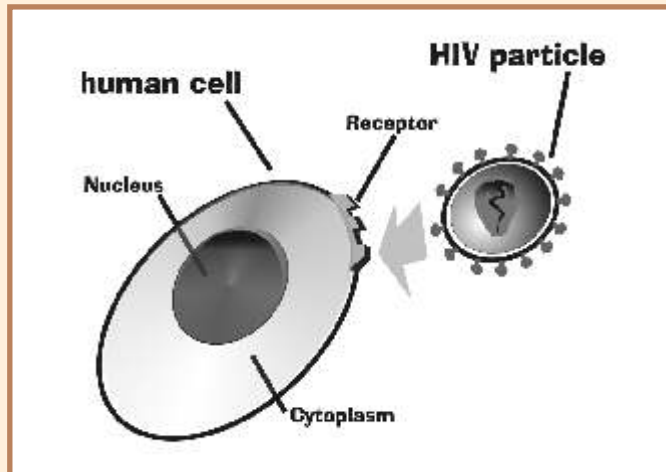
AIDS is an abbreviation for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome.

- A Acquired.....some thing you get rather than be born with
- I Immune.....resistance or protection from disease
- D Deficiency.....reduced of protective power
- S Syndrome.....a variety of symptoms rather than single disease

AIDS is when one suffers from any diseases (opportunistic infections) see section 5.

### 4. What causes AIDS?

HIV causes AIDS. When HIV enters the human body it attacks cells called immune cells (immune cells are also called white blood cells). These cells act as soldiers in our bodies, defending us from disease. Once HIV enters the body, it attacks the immune system and destroys the white blood cells slowly over time. If left untreated, the virus increases in number and keeps destroying the white blood cells until the body is too weak to fight disease and the person becomes ill. A person infected with HIV can still look and feel strong and healthy. But once the virus has entered a person's body, they can infect others even if they feel and look strong and healthy.



HI Virus approaches the Human white blood cell.

AIDS is the name given to a group of serious illnesses in HIV positive people, when they are no longer able to fight off the various infections they suffer from, because of lowered immunity caused by the HI virus. Infections that develop because HIV has weakened the immune system are called 'opportunistic infections'.



## 5. What are examples of common Opportunistic Infections (OIs)?

An opportunistic infection (OI) is a specific infection that people with HIV have problems fighting due to their weakened immune system. Often the body can fight off these infections if an individual has a healthy immune system.

Common opportunistic infections people with AIDS suffer from are:

- PCP (pneumocystis carinii pneumonia) a lung infection.
- CMV (Cytomegalovirus) an infection that affects the eyes.
- Candida, a fungal infection that causes thrush in your mouth or infections in your throat or vagina.
- Tuberculosis (TB)



Sam has T.B., does that mean he is HIV positive?

Having one of the illnesses termed as an opportunistic infection does not necessarily mean that you are HIV infected! HIV positive or not, we can all be infected with these illnesses if our immunity is low for some reason. If you are worried that you might be HIV positive, the only way to know for sure is to get tested!!



Remember...  
There is no cure for  
AIDS...YET!

Just when I think I "get" everything there is to know about HIV and AIDS, people use terms like "Window Period", "Seroconversion", and "Viral Load" and I'm lost again!! Help!?

After a certain time all people with HIV start to develop AIDS, as their body is no longer able to fight infection. The time between HIV infection and the onset of AIDS is different between individuals. Some people survive up to ten years or more without showing any symptoms of AIDS.

#### " QUIZ YOURSELF ON YOUR " HIV and AIDS LINGO"

There will always be new terms describing HIV and AIDS that you haven't heard of, but don't just accept not knowing the answer! For example, do you know what a "CD4 Count" is? Turn to page 5 to learn this answer and others!

# TRANSMISSION

## 1. How do you get infected with HIV?

Viruses cause all sorts of diseases when they enter our bodies. The virus can be passed from person to person through blood-to-blood and sexual contact commonly referred to as fluid exchange. Pregnant women can also pass the virus to their baby during pregnancy, delivery or while breast-feeding. HIV is present in:

- Blood and blood products
- Semen
- Secretions from the vagina and cervix
- Breast milk

HIV is present in VERY SMALL quantities in: saliva, tears, boil and blister fluid  
HIV is NOT present in Urine, Faeces, Vomit, and Sweat.

Window Period: The window period is the two to three months after initial HIV infection when HIV antibodies do not appear in the bloodstream of the infected person. This means that if an HIV test is done during this period, an infected person will test negative, even though she/he has the virus! This is very dangerous and risky, as during this period a person can continue to infect others with the HI virus, despite negative results. Therefore if your behavior has been risky in the three months prior to taking the HIV test, you need to take another test three months later to confirm your status! It is important to note that the HIV test is NOT a test for AIDS. Being infected with HIV does not mean one has AIDS. It is not clear how long an HIV infected person takes to become ill with AIDS.

Antibodies: An antibody is a special protein produced by certain white blood cells to fight against specific disease-causing organisms such as a particular virus or bacterium or other disease agent or substance.

Continued to next page

Seroconversion: During seroconversion HIV antibodies begin to show in the infected person's blood. The infected person will now be found HIV positive if they are tested. HIV infected persons may remain in this stage for months to many years. During this period, infection of other people can continue to occur.

Viral Load: Viral load is the amount of detectable or free HIV virus in an HIV infected person's blood. The higher the viral load the higher the chance of infecting someone.

## 2. What are the signs and symptoms of HIV infection?

A person who is infected with the HIV virus can look healthy for many years. In the first phases of infection (window period and sero-conversion), a person can live without signs of illness! This lack of symptoms in an HIV infected person can be very dangerous because they may not know they have the virus and can continue to infect healthy, non-infected persons. Since it is not easy to identify someone who has been infected with HIV, the only way to be certain if someone is infected or not is to take an HIV blood test.

Minor signs and symptoms of HIV infections include:

- Sweating a lot at night
- Itchy skin rash
- Mouth ulcers
- Oral thrush
- Swollen glands found in more than one part of the body
- Continuous cough for more than one month

The symptoms of HIV can often occur together or one after the other!

Major signs of HIV infection or symptoms of AIDS include:

- Loss of weight greater than 10 % of body weight
- Fever for longer than one month
- Chronic diarrhea for longer than one month
- Persistent tiredness

These symptoms are commonly found in other diseases as well, so the only way you can confirm if someone has HIV, is through a blood test!

## CAN YOU OR CAN'T YOU?

Here are 6 ways many people think HIV is transmitted; do you know which ones will put you at risk?

- |                       |                            |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1) Mosquito bite;     | 4) Mutual masturbation     |
| 2) Unprotected sex;   | 5) Giving birth;           |
| 3) Cleaning up vomit; | 6) Tattooing/ear piercing. |

Answers on Page 12

3. Are some people more likely to become HIV infected than others?



HIV does not care about the colour of our skin, our religion, our sexuality, our age, our job, our education, or how much money we have. YOU and I can get HIV!

## ALTHOUGH NO ONE PERSON'S BODY IS MORE LIKELY TO GET HIV OVER ANOTHER, THERE ARE BEHAVIOURS THAT CAN INCREASE YOUR CHANCES OF CONTRACTING HIV!

You are more likely to get infected with the HI virus if you:

- Have many sex partners and do not use condoms each time you have sexual intercourse
- Have a sexually transmitted infection (as the sores or open wounds on sexual organs make it easier for transmission of the virus).
- Inject drugs and share needles with other drug abusers.
- Drink a lot of alcohol. Alcohol weakens the ability to think rationally and you will be more likely to take risks in your sexual life.
- Get blood products or blood transfusions from a source that has not had its blood screened for HIV.
- Have cuts on your body made for traditional or cultural purposes with sharp instruments shared by different people.

# STIs AND HIV/AIDS

## 1. What are STIs?

S - Sexually  
T - Transmitted  
I - Infections



Do you know how to identify an STI?  
For example, what does a genital wart look like?

## 2. How are STIs transmitted?

Infected men and women can pass sexually transmitted infections to other people they have sexual intercourse with. These infections are transmitted through the exchange of bodily fluids during sex.

### 3. Why am I at risk of getting STIs?

A large number of young people are sexually active. In many countries, sexual activity begins in the early teen years. Having sex early increases your risk to STIs because:

- Your immature reproductive and immune systems make young people more vulnerable to damage caused by STIs both short and long term!
- As a young person, you may not be well informed about STIs and HIV and how to protect yourself.
- You may be afraid of medical systems and avoid seeking medical care or advice because of fear of being chastised by the usually older attending staff. This unwelcoming action could result in you seeking treatment for an STI too late.
- You may find it hard to say no to someone who is putting you under pressure to have sex. Once you have sex once, it is harder to say no and be believed the second time!

Did you know & YOUNG GIRLS are especially vulnerable to STIs because they are less able to refuse sex or insist on adequate protection? Sometimes they are sexually abused and coerced into sex by older men who may be infected.

Imagine a man not respecting the choice of your sister, your mother or your auntie to say no to sex! I respect girls who want to wait, and understand that when they say no, they mean NO!





STI TYPE	HOW TO IDENTIFY
Gonorrhea	<p>- <u>Men</u>: a burning sensation when urinating, frequent urination, and a greenish-yellowish discharge from the urethra.</p> <p>- <u>Women</u>: some experience no symptoms, though there may be a thick discharge from the vagina.</p>
Syphilis	A painless sore may appear on the penis or vagina (for women the sore can be on the inside of the vagina as well).
HIV	There is NO way to identify HIV on the outside!! The only way to know if you have HIV is to take a blood test!!
Herpes	Small blisters on or around the genital area.
Genital Warts	Small warts on or around the genital area, accompanied by tingling or itching.
Chlamydia	Discharge from the vagina, penis or anus, desire to pass urine frequently, pain or burning sensation when passing urine.

You may have noticed that the symptoms for many STIs are very similar. If you experience any of these symptoms or just don't feel right, the best thing to do is go to your doctor for a check up!

Ask a local health care professional to tell you more about STIs and their symptoms. Remember...CONDOM use is the best way to protect yourself if you are sexually active but ABSTINENCE is the most effective way to avoid STIs!!! Take a look at 'Part II: Let's Talk About Sex!' to learn more about methods of contraception and what they are really protecting you from. You will be surprised!

If you think you or someone you know may be at risk, talk to someone you trust. You only have one body; there is NO good reason to risk your health and your future!

## CAN YOU OR CAN'T YOU?

HOW DID YOU DO? (Answers for questions from page (7))

**NO RISK/LOW RISK:** (1) Mosquito bite, 3) Cleaning up vomit, 4) Mutual masturbation  
It is extremely unlikely you will get HIV in any of these ways! There is no evidence to suggest that HIV can be transmitted through insect bites, and if you remember from question 1 'How Do I get HIV?', HIV is not present in vomit! Remember...HIV is NOT an airborne, water borne, or food borne virus and does not survive long outside of the human body!

**RISKY BUSINESS:** 2) Unprotected sex, 5) Giving birth, 6) Tattooing/ear piercing

Fluid exchange through unprotected sex, and giving child birth (called "Parent-to-Child Transmission") or sharing unsterilised sharp instruments contaminated with blood are some of the most common ways that HIV is transmitted.

### 4. How are HIV and STIs related?

The open sores often created by STIs make it easier for HIV to enter the body during unprotected sex. The key to stopping the link between HIV and STIs is early treatment of STIs and using condoms during sex!

### Did you know?....from page 6

**CD4 Count.** A CD4 Count is a test used to determine if a person has AIDS. "CD4+T lymphocytes" are cells in the immune system that are depleted in people with AIDS. A person's CD4 levels are closely related to the treatment of HIV and AIDS. When the CD4 count in people with HIV drops to 200 or below they begin to develop opportunistic infections.

For more information on how to seek treatment for HIV and AIDS (ARVs, opportunistic infections, home-based care...etc), check out Part III of the 'You Asked...We Answered Series', HIV and AIDS: HOW CAN I MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

# TB AND HIV / AIDS

## 1. What is TB?

Tuberculosis (TB) is disease caused by a germ (called Mycobacterium tuberculosis) that damages lungs and other parts of the body. People with TB develop a severe, continuous cough (producing sputum stained with blood), often experience weight loss and are at great risk if the illness goes untreated, or does not respond to treatment.

Sputum is like phlegm or spit.

## 2. How is TB transmitted?

The disease is transmitted through the air. The source of infection is a person with TB who coughs or sneezes into the air that other people breath in. Transmission usually occurs indoors, since the droplets can stay in the air for a long time indoors or where it is dark and crowded and there is little ventilation and movement of air. Being infected by the bacteria does not necessarily mean you will develop TB.

You can develop TB:

- If you are exposed to a large concentration of infectious droplets in the air you breathe.
- If you are exposed to the infectious droplets for a long period of time in the air you are breathing eg people in crowded environments.
- If your immune system is weak in resisting infection and unable to fight off disease easily.

## 3. Can TB be cured? If so, why then are so many people with HIV and AIDS dying from it?

Yes TB is curable! TB treatment is done using anti-TB drugs.

The aim of anti-TB drug treatment is:

- To cure the patient of TB
- To prevent death from active TB
- To prevent the patient from getting TB again
- To control and decrease the transmission of TB to others

TB is one of the many opportunistic infections which are related to HIV infection. Because HIV weakens your immune system, having HIV is a powerful factor that can increase your chance of getting TB. Compared with persons who are HIV negative, an HIV positive person has 10 times the increased risk of developing TB.

Remember &not everyone with TB is HIV positive! TB has been a common problem in Africa for a long time. There were many people suffering from TB long before HIV was a problem! If you think that you might have TB visit your nearest clinic as soon as possible &getting treatment on time can help you live longer!

# MYTHS - DON'T BELIEVE THE LIES!

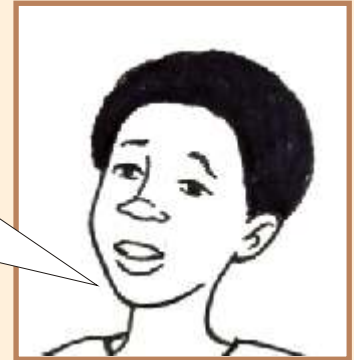
1. Is it worth fighting the HI Virus, since we will eventually, all die?

Yes it is!! Life has been given to each of us to be lived and made the most of. Remember that having HIV is just like having any other chronic disease, although one key difference between HIV and other chronic diseases is that you can take steps to avoid contracting it! So whether you have it or not, there are many ways to fight HIV. What is yours? Ask your friends the same question, and an interesting conversation is bound to occur!



I fight HIV by seeking out the knowledge on how to maintain a healthy and productive lifestyle...so whether or not I am HIV positive, my life will always be worth living!

Because I am HIV +ve, I access care that allows me to remain healthy enough to care for my children. I fight HIV by making sure that my children do not become orphans!



You're both right, but I think the best way to fight HIV is to avoid getting infected in the first place! People who are HIV negative can fight HIV by living the rest of their lives healthy and disease free. Once and for all, we can end the spread of HIV!

2. Can a person with blood type "O" be infected after having sex with an HIV infected person?

Yes! Anyone can get infected with HIV if they are exposed to it, it does not matter what blood type you have!

3. Can kissing someone who is HIV positive -ve infect me?

Open mouthed or "French kissing" is a very low-risk means of transmitting HIV. There is only one documented case of someone contracting HIV through kissing. If you or your partner have open sores in your mouth, bleeding gums or oral thrush, the chances of transmitting/contracting HIV increase.

4. Is it true that, you cannot contract HIV the first time you have sex if you are a virgin?

5. Is it true that if you are a virgin you cannot contract HIV the first time you have sex? I also heard that men with HIV can be cured by having sex with virgins, is that true?

NO! You can contract HIV whether it is your first or one hundredth time of having sex! The HI virus does not care how many times you have had sex and it will infect you during unprotected sex regardless of your past experiences!

Virgins do not hold any special power to either prevent or cure HIV! The only thing that will happen if an HIV infected man has unprotected sex with a virgin is that he will infect her as well!

# SUMMARY

So youths of southern Africa, these were your questions about HIV and AIDS, how did we do? Did you find some of the answers you were looking for?

Have you ever wondered: Is it natural and normal to have sex, how mom's who are HIV positive infect their babies, or if HIV test results are really treated confidentially? Part II and Part III of the 'You Asked... We Answered' series will address even more of the questions you have asked about things like sex, love, caring for people with HIV/AIDS and protecting your communities!

Keep in mind that these booklets can never answer all your questions! Don't stop here, challenge yourself to think of questions you may not know the answers to! Go out into your communities and find the answers, or contact us for more information:

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Website: [www.safaids.org.zw](http://www.safaids.org.zw)

Youth of southern Africa, your health is our future,  
by protecting YOURSELF you are protecting us ALL!

# RESOURCE LIST

## MALAWI

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Katutura Youth Enterprise  
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## ZAMBIA

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Association of Zambia  
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## Who is this booklet for?

The "You Asked...We Answered!" series of booklets has been primarily designed for youth like YOU!! It is to help you answer some of the many questions and fears you may have about your bodies, sex, love, HIV and AIDS. In fact, a young person somewhere in Southern Africa has asked SAfAIDS each question you see in this booklet! As you read through this booklet, keep asking yourself: Are the answers what you expected them to be? Do you have more questions that have not been answered?



If you are a peer educator or youth leader in your community, this booklet could be very useful for you in your activities. You are encouraged to share this booklet with as many of your family members, friends, peers and community members as you can.

## What's in Part (i) of the "You Asked...We Answered" Series?

In Part (i) of the series - HIV and AIDS - GET THE FACTS!, We explore your questions about the basics on HIV and AIDS such as what they are, how they are transmitted, how STIs and TB are related to HIV infection, and some common myths about HIV. Think of Part (i) as your "first step" in answering the many questions you have about HIV and AIDS After finishing Part (i) read part (ii), 'HIV and AIDS - Lets talk about sex' and part (iii) How Can I Make A Difference.

The 'You Asked.. We Answered' Series is not only meant to provide you with the answers you find on these pages. We also want young people like yourself to know the any question you have about your health and well-being deserves an answer<sup>1</sup> After you have read each part if the 'You Asked.. We Answered' series and you STILL have questions about HIV and AIDS, don't be shy, keep asking your questions until you feel satisfied with the answers you receive!