

## Ignorance of HIV reaches shocking high amongst the young

**GI Jonny**

October 2007

A new BBC survey suggests high levels of ignorance and complacency about HIV among 16 to 24 year olds, and marks the start of a two-month BBC HIV awareness campaign.

- Eighty-nine per cent of 16 to 24 year olds rarely or never think about HIV when making decisions about their sex lives.
- Nearly half (41%) of 16 to 24 year olds consider themselves to be at "no risk" of catching HIV.

The results come despite the fact that young heterosexuals (18-24s) are at increased risk of HIV and other STIs (sexually transmitted infections) – with the number of new diagnoses having continuing to increase in the last ten years (source: Health Protection Agency)\*.

The HIV awareness campaign will run across BBC outlets from 1 October 2007 until World AIDS Day on 1 December – launching with the **BBC Two** documentary series, **Stephen Fry: HIV And Me** (Tuesday 2 October, 9pm), and featuring **GI Jonny**, an interactive online campaign aimed at informing teenagers and young adults about HIV – as well as programming across **BBC Radio 1**, **1Xtra BBC**, **BBC Radio 2**, **BBC 6 Music**, **BBC Asian Network**, **BBC Nations and Regions**, and ending with a special episode of **Casualty** on **BBC One**.

The BBC survey suggests:

### Education and Myths

- Seventy-four per cent of 16 to 24 year olds demonstrated that they didn't know the correct facts about HIV.
- Over half (55%) of 16 to 24 year olds surveyed believe the myth that you can get HIV from kissing.
- Forty-seven per cent believe that it can be passed on from toilet seats.

- Over a quarter (26%) of 16 to 24 year olds do not feel informed about HIV and the issues surrounding its transmission and prevention.

## **Behaviour**

- In his documentary, Stephen Fry takes an HIV test to demonstrate how quick (15 minutes) and easy it now can be to have the test. Despite this, 45% of 16 to 24s would be reluctant to go for an HIV test if they suspected that they had the disease.
- Seventy-seven per cent of 16 to 24 year olds would not ask a new partner if they had HIV before sex.
- Sixty-eight per cent of 16 to 24 year olds would not ask a new partner if they had an STI before sex.

## **Launch of two-month HIV awareness campaign**

The HIV awareness campaign has been developed by **BBC Learning** in partnership with sexual health charity **Terrence Higgins Trust** to address the high levels of complacency about HIV among 16 to 24 year olds.

**Elizabeth McKay**, Project Executive at BBC Learning, said: "Levels of ignorance about HIV are at an all-time high among the age group most likely to catch a sexually transmitted infection. Young people told us they needed practical information about HIV that they could share with mates. GI Jonny is fun, always prepared for action, and fully armed with the facts about HIV."

The GI Jonny website, **gijonny.co.uk**, will help people learn the essential facts about HIV while customising their own GI action figure.

They can then build an elite force to help raise awareness of the key facts by sending the character on to their friends through the campaign website or social networking sites.

GI Jonny was designed to appeal to young people and deliver information in an relevant and unique manner.

As well as the GI Jonny website, there will be viral videos produced by BBC Comedy and The Viral Factory on youth sites and blogs, a Facebook application, and GI Jonny events in nine towns and cities across England, Scotland and Wales, as well as events organised by the NUS at university and colleges.

**Genevieve Clark**, Director of Communications at Terrence Higgins Trust, said: "Too many young people are leaving school not knowing how to protect themselves from HIV and other STIs. HIV is preventable, incurable and fatal if untreated, so GI Jonny is spreading a vital message in a way that really appeals to young people."

HIV is the fastest growing serious health condition in the UK. There are now 70,000 people living with HIV in the UK, and up to a third of them are unaware they have the virus. The Terrence Higgins Trust estimates that at least 400,000 people could have HIV by 2032 if current trends continue.

## Notes to Editors

- An online survey of 1,500 people ranging from 16 to 64 years old was carried out in May 2007 (source: Essential Research).
- \*Young heterosexuals account for 5% of all new HIV diagnoses but conditions are rife for this to worsen over the next few years. Young people are "behaviourally vulnerable" to catching STIs because of their higher numbers of sexual partners, earlier age of first sex, and because they may not have the skills and confidence to negotiate safer sex (source: Health Protection Agency, November 2006).
- Campaign visuals are available.
- Thirty eight per cent of young people don't wear a condom with a new partner (source: Radio 1, Bare All sex survey, 2006. Total number of respondents: 30,000, with 20,000 aged 14 to 24. See [survey results](#)).
- In the early Eighties, the government launched the "Don't Die Of Ignorance" campaigns. Twenty years and 25 million deaths later however we are told that we're "losing the fight against AIDS" with infections rising – particularly amongst three groups: the young, black African communities, and heterosexuals – in fact the number of new infections amongst straight people now outweighs those in the gay world.
- On a personal journey in Stephen Fry: HIV And Me (2 and 9 Oct, 9pm, BBC Two), Stephen explores why, despite the horrific figures – over 40 million worldwide and 70,000 in the UK now live with the virus – HIV/AIDS has fallen off the radar.
- Over a third of those infected do not know they carry the virus even though HIV tests take just 15 minutes.
- Virals are available on request and via the website (first viral launches on [gijonny.co.uk](http://gijonny.co.uk) on 9 October).
- During the duration of the campaign, GI Jonny events will take place in: Brighton, Bristol, Oxford, Birmingham, Southend, Liverpool, Leeds, Cardiff, Glasgow.
- A number of Student Unions will stage GI Jonny events in late November.
- A total of 150,000 condoms, donated by Durex, carrying the GI Jonny message about HIV will be handed out to the target audience.
- The campaign will be supported by programming across BBC channels: BBC One, BBC Two, Radio 1, 1Xtra, Radio 2, 6 Music, and Asian Network.