

An HIV/AIDS Prevention Message For America's Youth

BY SCOTT PHELPS December 1, 2015



Charlie Sheen's HIV diagnosis comes as a great surprise to Hollywood and the rest of the nation. Sheen says that the news of his infection was "a mule-kick to my soul." Indeed. The news is particularly startling because HIV in the U.S. is an extremely rare disease even among those who like Charlie Sheen are notoriously promiscuous.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, there are an estimated 20,000,000 cases of sexually transmitted diseases per year in the United States. Of these infections, an estimated 41,000 are HIV. This means HIV represents less than one quarter of one percent of all STDs. This isn't to minimize concerns about HIV but rather to place it in context with other STDs such as human papilloma virus, chlamydia, and herpes for example.

Sheen's news is especially surprising because while HIV is rare, it is almost unknown among white heterosexual men in the U.S. Of the estimated 41,000 annual cases of sexually transmitted HIV, the CDC estimates that white heterosexual males account for just 422 of those cases. That estimate is about 40 percent higher than the reported 305 cases in the current report. In other words, the high-water CDC estimate is that white heterosexual men account for just 1 percent of HIV cases in the U.S. So yes, Charlie Sheen's news is a big surprise.

With Hollywood, the internet, and the entertainment media being the primary educators of our youth in today's culture, those of us who are parents and teachers have our work cut out for us to wrestle back our roles as primary educators on these matters. The CDC provides helpful guidelines:

"School systems should make programs available that will enable and encourage young people who have not engaged in sexual intercourse and who have not used illicit drugs to continue to:

- Abstain from sexual intercourse until they are ready to establish a mutually monogamous relationship within the context of marriage.
- Refrain from using or injecting illicit drugs."

"For young people who have engaged in sexual intercourse or who have injected illicit drugs, school programs should enable and encourage them to:

- Stop engaging in sexual intercourse until they are ready to establish a mutually monogamous relationship within the context of marriage.
- To stop using or injecting illicit drugs."

This is the primary prevention message on HIV/AIDS of which we hear far too little and is virtually unknown to America's youth.

On World AIDS Day and throughout the year, we who are parents, pastors, and educators would do well to provide a clear, honest, simple message for our youth: "HIV is an almost entirely preventable disease and the best way to avoid infection is to save all sexual activity for marriage."

Charlie Sheen says he will now work to help others avoid his fate. If he will promote this primary message he will succeed where many have failed and will leverage his pain for the good of others. We wish him all the best in this noble effort.

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