Why we need to teach about HIV and AIDS in our schools

Towards a comprehensive education sector response to HIV and AIDS in Sri Lanka
Questions for you

1. Will teaching sex and HIV/AIDS education encourage students to have sex?
2. Will teaching sex education create behavioural problems?
3. Will teaching about drugs encourage students to take drugs?
More than half of all new infections – around 7,000 every day - occur among young people.
Young people are especially vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.
Young people, especially in urban areas, are increasingly sexually active.
Young people and teachers are the greatest hope in changing the course of the epidemic.
Education is the only vaccine

- **There is no cure** or vaccine for HIV
  - Education is the only way to prevent HIV
- But HIV/AIDS is associated with:
  - Sex, disease, and death
  - Behaviours that are illegal, forbidden or taboo, such as pre- and extramarital sex, sex work, sex between men, and injecting drug use
The MOE has a huge opportunity

- The MOE is in a unique position to reach young people with preventive education and life skills education
  - To students before they undertake risky behaviours
- The MOE - especially teachers - can help diminish stigma and discrimination of people living with HIV
Principles for HIV Preventive Education

- Concerning student behaviour
  - Maintain what is responsible
  - Change what is not responsible
- Be sensitive to traditional, cultural, religious values and involve parents
- Emphasize the importance of healthy living
Education and HIV/AIDS

- The most powerful education response to HIV is to get children into school and keep them there for as many years as possible – i.e., Education For All
- While at school, teach them worthwhile knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes
HIV prevalence in Rural Uganda for individuals aged 18-29: 1990-2001
The Ministry of Education needs to provide:

- Clear national policies to support HIV prevention
- School-based risk reduction education specifically targeting HIV
- Scientifically accurate, culturally appropriate, quality teaching/learning materials
Help Students Avoid HIV Transmission

- Ensure they are well informed
- Help them recognize their personal vulnerabilities
- Promote life-affirming attitudes and values
- Deepen their understanding of the meaning and implications of sexuality and relationships
- Create a culture that does not tolerate substance abuse (alcohol, smoking, drug taking)
Stigma and discrimination

- Stigma, for many people living with HIV/AIDS, is far **worse than the actual symptoms** of HIV/AIDS.
- Stigma leads to higher infection rates because it prevents people from getting tested and protecting themselves and their partners from infection.
Research by Douglas Kirby and others on 83 sex and HIV education programmes for young people show:

- Sex education will **not** lead to early sexual activity
- On average they will delay starting sexual activities
- Are more likely to protect themselves once they start having sex