

## Can We Increase Perceived Vulnerability to Becoming HIV/HEP Infected Among Students in the General Population to Get Them Thinking about Testing?

**Topic:** Combination Prevention: Optimizing Implementation of Testing and PrEP

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### Objectives:

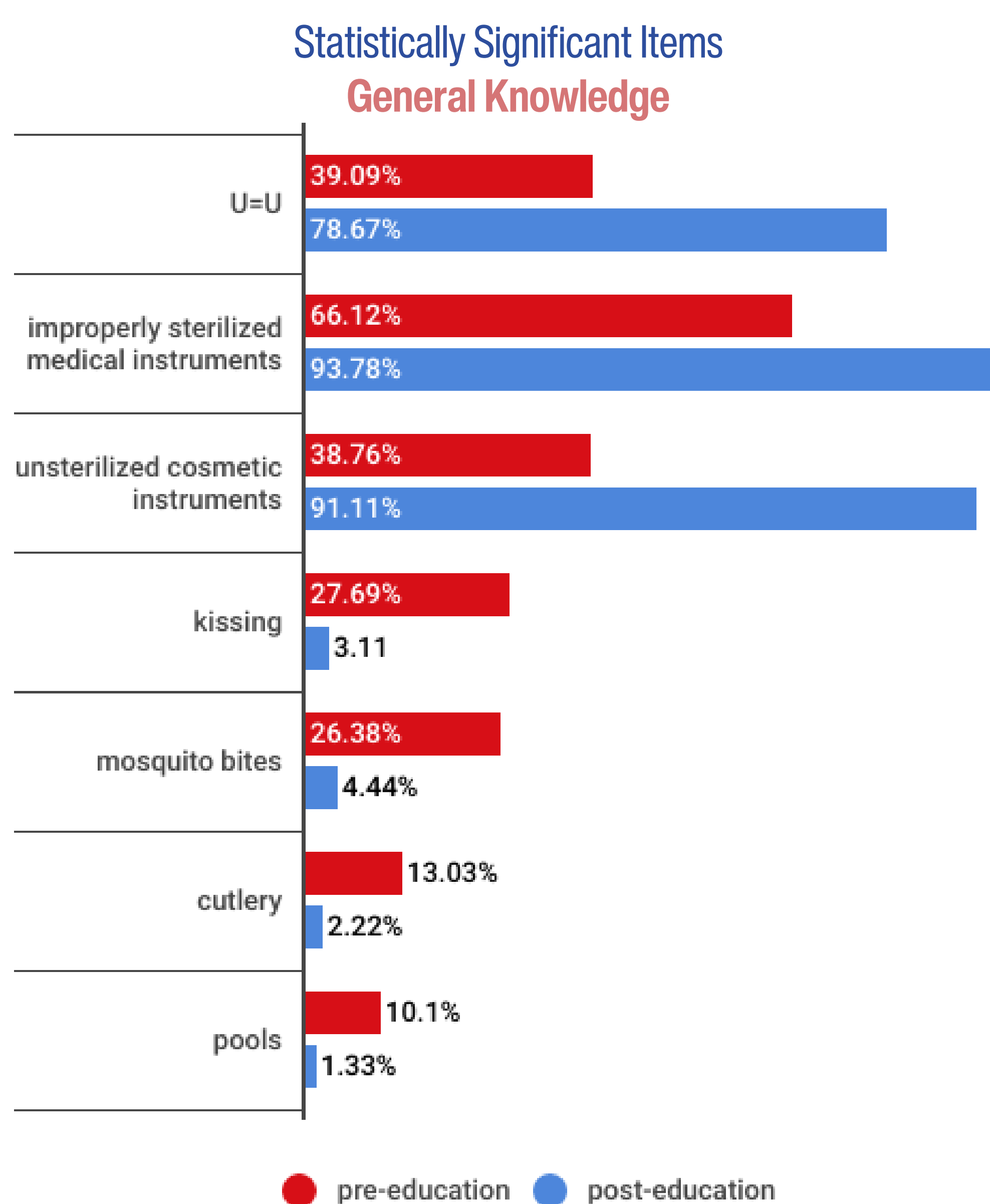
Educating young people about their vulnerability to becoming HIV/Hep infected is crucial in increasing willingness to testing and implementing preventive behaviours. We wanted to identify the impact of one education session on improving knowledge, perceived disease vulnerability, severity and stigmatizing attitudes towards people living with HIV/Hep by comparing the before-and-after assessments among high-school students in Constanța, Romania.

### Methods:

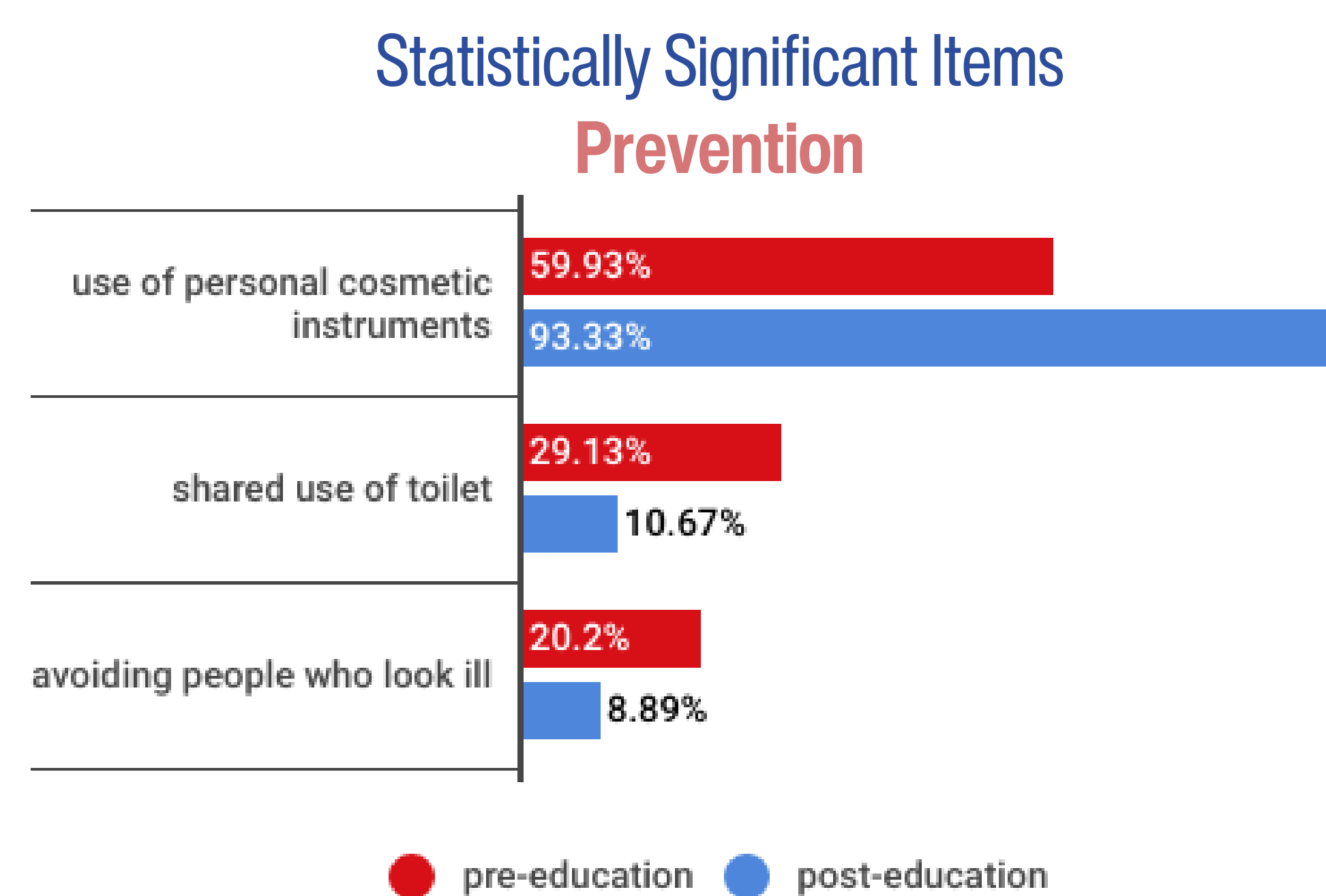
People's intention to get tested is associated with perceived personal vulnerability, knowledge, perceived disease severity, and attitudes. During November 2022- May 2023, two educators from Baylor Black Sea Foundation provided health education to teenagers and young students about HIV and hepatitis B & C. Health educators delivered one-hour-long sessions about HIV/Hep structured as initial assessment, interactive education followed by a final assessment via questionnaire.

### Results:

The data collected from the anonymous survey (n = 307 pre-education, n= 225 post-education) revealed that a vast majority of the respondents were female, with ages ranging from 14-19. About 42% of the participants were hearing about HIV/Hep for the first time, while 1 in 4 had previously tested for the viruses. Personal acquaintance of someone living with hepatitis was 24%, and only 6% for HIV. Regarding stigma attitudes, students showed accepting and positive attitudes towards PLWH/Hep. According to the survey results, more than 80% of the respondents were willing to befriend such individuals, and believed that they should not face any restrictions in their professions. It is impressive that the majority of the respondents did not associate personal guilt with getting the infection or living in a disadvantaged environment. The session alleviated concerns regarding personal safety when interacting with them (chi 7.22, p<.05).



The study found statistically significant differences in knowledge about HIV transmission through various means before and after the health education sessions. Participants showed high levels of understanding regarding condom use and sexual transmission risks, with 96%-99% correctly answering related questions. The sessions effectively increased awareness about transmission through medical and cosmetic instruments, kissing, mosquito bites, cutlery use, going to the pool, and that people living with HIV can have healthy children.



The health education sessions effectively increased students' awareness about the pervasive risks of HIV transmission in society and that anyone can become infected, thus changing their perceived vulnerability (chi 77.29, p<.05). Additionally, the participants rated the perceived severity of HIV transmission as high, with an average rating of 3.3 out of 4 before the sessions

### Conclusions:

One HIV and Hepatitis Health Education Session Significantly Increases Knowledge and Perceived Vulnerability. We have learned that prioritizing content about other transmission risks besides sexual ones can decrease personal fear and potential stigmatizing attitudes when interacting with a person with HIV/Hep. Interestingly, stigma, perceived severity, and the association between condomless sex and risk of transmission had good levels among the students before the intervention. This can be an indication of improved access to information among younger people. This initiative helped our team tailor content for future health education sessions.

