



## An Interactive Videogame for HIV Prevention in Early Adolescents

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### What is the research about?

Minority adolescents in the United States continue to have disproportionately high rates of HIV infection. Unfortunately, existing risk behavior prevention programs are limited in scope and reach, often focusing on decreasing participation in, rather than preventing initiation of risk behaviors. This research focused on using videogames to engage minority youth in an accessible, dynamic, and interactive intervention to prevent the onset of risk taking behavior.

### Why is this important for HIV prevention and treatment?

Given the high incidence of new HIV infections among youth, effective HIV prevention and treatment interventions need to demonstrate a sensitivity to the unique perspectives and needs of this population. *PlayForward: Elm City Stories* strives to meet adolescents “where they live,” by delivering an intervention in a medium that is highly accessible to them, experiential, and personalized.

### What did the researchers do?

The multi-disciplinary team at the play2PREVENT Lab developed and evaluated *PlayForward: Elm City Stories*, an interactive videogame for young minority adolescents in the U.S., aged 11-14 years old, that aims to provide teens with the knowledge and skills to avoid risk behaviors associated with HIV infection. The videogame was developed with the expertise of physicians, psychologists, educators and game developers, literature reviews, and the perspectives and experiences of local adolescents collected in focus groups. The efficacy of the videogame was then evaluated in a randomized-controlled trial with over 300 adolescents from 12 local school and afterschool programs.

### What did the researchers find?

There was a significant difference in outcomes in participants who played *PlayForward* compared to those who played the control games. Most players also enjoyed the game, felt responsible for the choices they made in the game

and felt they would make the same decisions in real life.

### How can you use this research?

*PlayForward: Elm City Stories* has potential value as an educational tool and HIV prevention intervention. Since the videogame provides players with knowledge and skills to handle decisions about sexual risk behavior, safe driving, drug and alcohol use, among other themes, it could serve as an interactive, engaging complement to school health education programs or as a substitute in places where such programs may not exist. Though written and designed to reflect the real experiences and perspectives of minority youth in New Haven, the storylines and content can be adapted for different populations and communities.

### Original Research Article:

Hieftje, K.D., Rosenthal, M.S., Camenga, D.R., Edelman, E.J., Fiellin, L.E. A qualitative study to inform the development of a videogame for adolescent human immunodeficiency virus prevention. *Games for Health Journal*, Aug 2012, 1(4)294-298.

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