

HIV

HIV is human immunodeficiency virus. HIV is passed on through bodily fluids—blood, semen (cum and pre-cum), vaginal and rectal fluids, and breast milk of an HIV-infected person. People can get HIV infection when they have contact with these fluids and a mucous membrane or damaged skin. Mucous membranes are found in the mouth, penis, vagina and anus.

People can also become infected with HIV when using injection drugs through sharing needles and other equipment (or works) including cookers and cottons with someone who is infected.

HIV is **not** transmitted by day-to-day contact in social settings, schools or in the workplace. You can't be infected by shaking someone's hand, by hugging someone, by using the same toilet or drinking from the same glass as an HIV-positive person, playing sports with or by being exposed to coughing or sneezing by anyone living with HIV. There is no evidence that HIV is spread through kissing.

Getting Tested

Most people infected with HIV don't know that they are infected, because they don't feel sick immediately after infection. But some people do experience an illness with fever, rash, joint pains and enlarged lymph nodes. If an immune reaction to HIV occurs, it usually happens between 1 and 6 weeks after a person is infected with HIV.

OVERVIEW

- HIV is the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). HIV is spread from one person to another through bodily fluids.
- AIDS is Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. AIDS is the last stage of HIV infection.
- In the United States, about 50,000 people are infected with HIV each year and about 1.2 million people are living with HIV. Of those with HIV, about 14% don't know they have it, as it can take months or years for any signs of illness to appear.

A person with HIV may look healthy and feel good, but they can still pass the virus to others, especially during the initial infection period. The only way to know is by testing.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends at least one HIV test for everyone aged 13 to 64. CDC also suggests people at higher risk get tested more often.

Knowing your HIV status has two important benefits. First, if you are HIV positive, you can take necessary steps before symptoms appear to get treatment, care and support services, potentially prolonging your life for many years. Second, if you know you are infected, you can take precautions to not pass on HIV to others.

Most people infected with HIV will have detectable antibodies within 3 months of exposure to HIV, the average being 25 days. Rarely, it can take up to six months.

If your test result is positive, it means you have HIV infection and could benefit from special medical care. There are medicines that can help you stay healthy, so it's important to connect with a healthcare provider as soon as possible to start treatment.

If your result is negative it is still possible that you have HIV. Make sure you've waited at least three months after you've been exposed to HIV, as it may take that long before a test can find it.

Reducing Your Risk for HIV

- Use a latex condom (if you are not allergic to latex) from start to finish every time you have anal, vaginal or oral sex. Latex condoms, when used correctly and consistently, are very effective in preventing transmission of HIV and other STIs.
- Pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP, is a prevention option for people who are at high risk. When taken every day, PrEP has been shown to reduce the risk of HIV infection by more than 90%.
- Post-exposure prophylaxis, or PEP, is a drug you can take after at least 72 hours, or no more than 3 days, after a high-risk event. If taken in time, it can help reduce your chance of getting HIV.
- If you share sex toys with a partner, such as a dildo or vibrator, each partner should use a new condom on the sex toy. Be sure to thoroughly clean sex toys after each use.
- If you use a lubricant, use one that is water-based. Lubricants containing oil (such as Vaseline® or hand lotion) might cause latex condoms to break.
- Having certain STIs, like syphilis, herpes, chlamydia, gonorrhea or trichomoniasis can increase your risk of getting HIV by at least 2 to 5 times if you are exposed. Get tested regularly.

Learn More

Learn more about HIV and other STIs from the American Sexual Health Association, a trusted nonprofit organization that has advocated on behalf of those at risk for STIs for more than a century. Our websites include:

www.ashasexualhealth.org
www.iwannaknow.org
www.quierosaber.org
www.nccc-online.org
www.askexpertsnow.com
www.YESmeansTEST.org

