

HIV and AIDS

What is it?

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. HIV weakens the body's immune system. Having a weakened immune system makes it hard for your body to fight off infections. Someone who is diagnosed with HIV is said to be 'HIV positive'.

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. This can take many years. If HIV is not treated, it can develop into AIDS. People on HIV treatment do not develop AIDS.

How do I know I have it?

Most people don't have symptoms. If you do have symptoms they are like having the flu and could include a sore throat, swollen glands or a rash on your body. These usually happen within a few weeks of being infected. They can go away in a week. After the first illness, people with HIV infection usually have no symptoms.,

How did I get it?

HIV is in the blood, semen (cum), vaginal fluid or breast milk of an infected person.

It can be passed on.

- During anal or vaginal sex without a condom
- By sharing drug-injecting equipment
- By unsafe injections, tattoos or piercings
- To a HIV positive mother's baby during pregnancy, childbirth or breast-feeding.

HIV is not passed on by.

- Kissing or cuddling.
- By day-to-day social contact such as shaking hands.
- By sharing cutlery, cups or glasses.
- By eating food prepared by someone with HIV.
- Through toilet seats.
- By mosquito or other animal bites.

Are HIV and AIDS the same thing?

No, AIDS is a late stage of the HIV infection. AIDS is diagnosed when someone with HIV infection has a really damaged immune system. People on HIV treatment do not develop AIDS.

How can I make sure I don't get it?

Using a condom during anal and vaginal sex. Add a water-based lubricant for anal sex.

If you inject drugs, do not share needles and syringes or other injecting equipment. Try to make sure the equipment you use is new and hasn't been used by anyone else. You can get new injecting equipment from your local needle and syringe program (NSP). These are free, anonymous and confidential services. You can also get injecting equipment from pharmacies.

By taking PrEP (Pre-exposure prophylaxis). PrEP is a medication taken daily to prevent HIV. It is for people who don't have HIV but who are at risk of becoming infected. For more information on PrEP please talk to your doctor or call the Sexual Health Info Link on 1800 451 624.

Another prevention option is when a person with HIV takes antiretroviral treatment. If taken correctly the level of virus in the blood of a person with HIV is very low ('undetectable') and prevents spreading HIV to sexual partner/s. For more information on antiretroviral treatment talk to your doctor.

If you think you have been exposed to HIV, you may want to think about taking Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP). PEP is a medication you take for one month to reduce the risk of getting HIV.. It is important to start it as soon as possible after the risk and within 72 hours (3 days Find out about PEP by calling the NSW PEP Hotline on 1800 737 669.

Have regular STI/HIV checks – doing this stops STIs/HIV from causing serious health issues. It also helps stop the spread of STIs to others.

Even if you're using other ways to prevent HIV, condoms will also protect you against other sexually transmitted infections.

How can the nurse/ Doctor tell me if I have it?

HIV is diagnosed by a blood test. If you have come into contact with HIV, your immune system will produce antibodies. They will try to fight the infection. These are detected by the test.

If the first test is positive, another test will be done to confirm the result. The result will tell you if you have HIV or not.

How can I get rid of it?

There is no cure for HIV but there is safe and effective treatment. People start treatment soon after they are diagnosed with HIV. People with HIV taking treatment can have healthy long lives.

Who do I need to tell and why?

When you are waiting for results always use a condom when having sex.

People diagnosed with STIs, including HIV, are required by law (*NSW Public Health Act*) to take 'reasonable precautions' against transmitting HIV to another person.. Reasonable precautions for HIV transmission includes using condoms during sexual intercourse or knowing that the virus is 'undetectable' (i.e. having a HIV viral load of less than 200 copies/mL) by taking HIV treatment, or confirming that with your sexual partner/s that they are taking HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). You should ensure you only inject with sterile injecting equipment and no one uses the equipment after you.

You can discuss this in more detail with your HIV specialist doctor.

This fact sheet is just some general information. If you are worried about your health go and see a doctor.

For more information on STIs and safe sex visit the Play Safe website:

www.playsafe.health.nsw.gov.au

Sexual Health Info Link is a service that you can call up for information on STIs and sexual health. It's anonymous and non-judgemental. Call: 1800 451 624 or visit <https://www.shil.nsw.gov.au/>

"Let them know" allows you to send an anonymous messages to tell someone you've had sex with that they have come into contact with the infection: <http://www.letthemknow.org.au/>