

HIV is a virus that damages the immune system. It is transmitted through body fluids. Treatments are available for HIV, but there is no vaccine and no cure. AIDS is a late stage of HIV infection.

HIV and AIDS

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What is HIV and AIDS?

HIV stands for *Human Immunodeficiency Virus*. HIV damages the body's immune system, which makes it more difficult to fight off infections. Someone who is diagnosed with HIV is *HIV positive*. If HIV is not treated, it eventually develops into AIDS, but this can take many years.

AIDS stands for *Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome*. Treatment for HIV can prevent the development of AIDS.

What are the symptoms of HIV and AIDS?

HIV Symptoms

Most people have mild symptoms or no symptoms. Some people have flu-like symptoms that can include swollen glands or a rash on the body. These symptoms usually happen within a few weeks of being infected and can disappear in a week.

AIDS Symptoms

If someone's immune system is badly damaged, their symptoms can include diarrhoea; appetite and weight loss; fever and extreme tiredness. The person may be at risk of developing an AIDS-defining condition. AIDS-defining conditions are illnesses that may not be a threat to people with strong immune systems but they may be fatal to someone whose immune system is damaged.

How is it transmitted?

HIV is in the blood, semen, vaginal fluid or breast milk of an infected person and can be transmitted:

- during anal or vaginal sex without a condom (this is known as *unprotected sex* or *unsafe sex*)
- by sharing drug injecting equipment
- to an HIV infected mother's baby during pregnancy, childbirth or breast-feeding

HIV can be transmitted through blood, semen, vaginal fluids and breast milk whether or not there are symptoms.

HIV is rarely transmitted by oral sex without a condom

HIV is **not** transmitted 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; or by mosquito or other animal bites.

How is it prevented?

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

If you inject drugs, do not share needles and syringes or other injecting equipment. Try to make sure the equipment you use is sterile. You can get sterile needles and syringes from your local needle and syringe program (NSP). These are free and confidential services. You can also get sterile needles and syringes from some pharmacies.

If you think you have been very recently exposed to HIV, you may want to consider taking *Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP)*. PEP is a combination of drugs that you need to take for one month. It is important to take PEP as soon as possible after the risk event and certainly within 72 hours (3 days). Because PEP needs to be started as soon as possible after exposure, you should act quickly. Find out about PEP by calling the **PEP Information Line** on **1800 737 669**.

Go for a regular check-up to find infections before complications develop and to prevent transmission to others. Always use condoms.

How is it diagnosed?

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

If the first test is positive, another test will be done to confirm the result. If the result is confirmed, it means that you have HIV, also referred to as being HIV positive.

How is it treated?

There is no cure for HIV or AIDS but there is effective treatment which can greatly slow progression to AIDS. The treatments allow people with HIV to live and manage their illness.

Telling partners

If you are waiting for the results of an HIV test, it is important to continue safe sex and safe injecting practices.

If your test result is positive, you are required by law, to inform all potential sexual partners of your diagnosis before having sex, even when you use a condom.

HIV and AIDS are notifiable. This means that doctors and laboratory staff are legally required to tell NSW Health about new cases. This information is confidential and is used for public health planning.

The information in this fact sheet is general and you should see a doctor if you are worried about your health.

Contact

NSW Sexual Health Infoline freecall **1800 451 624**.

Further information on HIV support and referral can be found at the [AIDS Council of NSW \(ACON\)](http://www.acon.org.au), www.acon.org.au freecall **1800 063 060**.

Multilingual information on HIV/AIDS is available from the Multicultural HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C Service, www.multiculturalhivhepc.net phone **(02) 9515 5030** or freecall **1800 108 098** (outside Sydney).