

HIV-AIDS FACTS/INFORMATION

HIV: *HIV* stands for human immunodeficiency virus. This is the virus that causes AIDS. HIV is different from most other viruses because it attacks the immune system. The immune system gives our bodies the ability to fight infections. HIV finds and destroys a type of white blood cell (T cells or CD4 cells) that the immune system must have to fight disease.

AIDS: *AIDS* stands for acquired immunodeficiency syndrome. AIDS is the final stage of HIV infection. It can take years for a person infected with HIV, even without treatment, to reach this stage. Having AIDS means that the virus has weakened the immune system to the point at which the body has a difficult time fighting infection. When someone has one or more specific infections, certain cancers, or a very low number of T cells, he or she is considered to have AIDS.

How HIV Is and Is Not Transmitted

HIV is a fragile virus. It cannot live for very long outside the body. As a result, the virus **is not transmitted** through day-to-day activities such as shaking hands, hugging, or a casual kiss. You cannot become infected from a toilet seat, drinking fountain, doorknob, dishes, drinking glasses, food, or pets. You also cannot get HIV from mosquitoes.

HIV is primarily found in the blood, semen, or vaginal fluid of an infected person. **HIV is transmitted in 3 main ways:**

- Having sex (anal, vaginal, or oral) with someone infected with HIV
- Sharing needles and syringes with someone infected with HIV
- Being exposed (fetus or infant) to HIV before or during birth or through breastfeeding

HIV also can be transmitted through blood infected with HIV. However, since 1985, all donated blood in the United States has been tested for HIV. Therefore, the risk for HIV infection through the transfusion of blood or blood products is extremely low. The US blood supply is considered among the safest in the world.

Preventing Transmission

Your risk of getting HIV or passing it to someone else depends on several things. Do you know what they are? You might want to talk to someone who knows about HIV. You can also do the following:

Abstain from sex (do not have oral, anal, or vaginal sex) until you are in a relationship with only one person, are having sex with only each other, and each of you knows the other's HIV status. If both you and your partner have HIV, use condoms to prevent other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and possible infection with a different strain of HIV. If only one of you has HIV, use a latex condom and water-based lubricant every time you have sex.

Even if you think you have low risk for HIV infection, get tested whenever you have a regular medical check-up. Do not inject illicit drugs (drugs not prescribed by your doctor). You can get HIV through needles, syringes, and other works if they are contaminated with the blood of someone who has HIV. Drugs also cloud your mind, which may result in riskier sex. Do not have sex when you are taking drugs or drinking alcohol because being high can make you more likely to take risks.

To protect yourself, remember these ABCs: **A=Abstinence, B=Be Faithful, C=Condoms**

The only way to know if you are infected is to be tested for HIV infection. You cannot rely on symptoms to know whether or not you are infected. Many people who are infected with HIV do not have any symptoms at all for 10 years or more.

The following may be warning signs of advanced HIV infection: rapid weight loss; dry cough; recurring fever or profuse night sweats; profound and unexplained fatigue; swollen lymph glands in the armpits, groin, or neck; diarrhea that lasts for more than a week; white spots or unusual blemishes on the tongue, in the mouth, or in the throat; pneumonia; red, brown, pink, or purplish blotches on or under the skin or inside the mouth, nose, or eyelids; or memory loss, depression, and other neurological disorders. However, no one should assume they are infected if they have any of these symptoms. Each of these symptoms can be related to other illnesses. Again, **the only way to determine whether you are infected is to be tested for HIV infection.**

HIV Testing

Once HIV enters the body, the body starts to produce antibodies—substances the immune system creates after infection. Most HIV tests look for these antibodies rather than the virus itself. There are many different kinds of HIV tests, including rapid tests and home test kits. All HIV tests approved by the US government are very good at finding HIV.

Finding a Testing Site

Many places offer HIV testing: health departments, doctors' offices, hospitals, and sites specifically set up to provide HIV testing. You can locate a testing site by calling CDC-INFO (formerly the CDC National AIDS Hotline) at 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) 24 Hours/Day. You do not have to give any personal information about yourself to use these services to find a testing site.

Source: <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/basic/print/index.htm>

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND/OR TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT FOR TESTING:

CDC National AIDS Hotline (800)232-4636	AIDS Volunteers of Lexington (AVOL) 225 Walton Ave, Suite 110 (859) 225-3000	Lexington-Fayette County Health Dept. 805B Newtown Circle (859) 288-AIDS (2437)
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