



# HIV/AIDS

## What is HIV/AIDS?

Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is a very serious disease. You can get it from the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). HIV harms your immune system, compromising its ability to protect you against infections. Since people with AIDS do not have this protection, they can get many different infections and cancers.

## How can I get HIV/AIDS?

You can get AIDS only if the HIV virus gets into your body. The virus can be carried into your body in semen, fluid from the vagina, or blood. People can get the HIV infection when they have sex or when they share drug-use equipment such as needles or syringes. An infected mother can pass HIV on to her baby during pregnancy, delivery, or breastfeeding.

## How can I prevent HIV/AIDS?

You can get HIV/AIDS from other infected people through contact with their blood or body fluids. Most HIV infections happen when you have sex or share injection needles with someone who is infected. It is also possible to get HIV from dirty tattoo equipment, or by sharing a razor or a toothbrush with someone who has HIV. You can **not** get HIV from touching, shaking hands, or hugging a person who has HIV or AIDS. You can **not** get HIV from pets or biting insects such as mosquitoes.

Some people think they may get HIV if they donate blood. This is not true. The nurse who takes your blood uses a new needle for each person. There is no contact with anyone else's blood when you give blood.

The blood that people give is always checked for HIV, so there is a very low risk of getting HIV from the blood given in a hospital.

## Is kissing safe?

You can not get HIV or AIDS from kissing. Deep kissing or "French kissing" is safe.

## How can I tell if I have HIV infection?

There is a blood test for HIV called the HIV antibody test. Persons testing for HIV can choose whether to use their names or initials for the test.

If your HIV test result is positive, it means you are infected with HIV.

If the test result is negative, it probably means you do not have HIV antibodies, but these can take three to six months to show up. If this amount of time has not passed prior to your test, your test can be negative but you could still have the virus. If there is a chance you have been infected recently, the only way to be sure you do not have HIV is to have a second test three months after your first test.

AIDS is the last stage of the HIV infection. People who have AIDS may become very ill and die from the disease or its complications. But you can protect yourself against HIV and AIDS.

### How can I protect myself against HIV/AIDS?

- Use a new condom every time you have sex, even oral sex.
- Having many sex partners increases your risk.
- Do **not** share injection needles, syringes or other injection equipment.
- Do **not** share razors or toothbrushes.
- Make sure that all tattoo equipment is sterile.

If you take risks having sex, you can get infections, and you can pass on the infections to people who have sex with you *and* to their unborn babies. Protect yourself and others by having safe sex.

### What should I do if you think I may have HIV or AIDS?

If you think you have symptoms, or if you took a risk having sex or using drugs, see your doctor or go to a STI (sexually transmitted infection) clinic. You may need to have a blood test. If your blood test is positive, it means you have been infected with HIV, and you could pass it on to others. It does not mean that you have AIDS or that you will get it.

### What is the treatment for HIV/AIDS?

There is no cure for HIV infection or AIDS. The virus stays in your body. However, doctors have effective medicines to treat HIV and its complications. Getting early treatment can slow down the virus and help you stay healthy.

### Inform your partner(s)

Since HIV is a reportable disease in British Columbia, it is important that your sex partner(s) and anyone you have shared needles with be notified if you have HIV. They will have to decide if they want to be tested for HIV infection.

You may want to tell them yourself. If you cannot tell them, then talk to the doctor or nurse. They can help to notify partners in a confidential manner, so you do not need to reveal your test results to others.



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