

## **THE BASICS**

### **What is HIV?**

HIV- Human Im-mu-no-de-fi-cien-cy Virus - is the virus that causes AIDS. HIV infects human cells and uses their energy and nutrients to grow and reproduce.

### **What is AIDS?**

AIDS is caused by HIV. AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) is a disease that causes the body's immune system to break down. When this happens, the body is unable to fight off many infections.

### **If I get HIV/AIDS, can someone cure it?**

No. There are new drugs that help people who have HIV/AIDS live longer lives, but they have really harsh side-effects and are by no means a cure.

### **How can I get HIV?**

HIV is transmitted by infected bodily fluids – i.e. blood, semen (cum), vaginal secretions, and breast milk – entering your bloodstream. This can occur when:

You have unprotected sex (vaginal, anal or oral)

You have unprotected ORAL sex: [oral-genital](#) contact can be risky, especially when ejaculation occurs in the mouth. HIV may enter your bloodstream through cuts or sores in your mouth. These cuts or sores may be caused by a [HERPES](#) sore, a recent tooth brushing or a canker sore. You may have a cut so slight that you may not even notice it. So use protection every time you have oral sex!

You share needles or syringes: HIV can live in used syringes for a month or more - NEVER reuse or share syringes!

As well, infection can be transmitted during pregnancy, childbirth, or breast feeding (mother-to-infant transmission): HIV is found in breast milk as well as in blood, so transmission from an infected mother to her infant - before or after birth - is possible.

**Am I at risk for HIV?**

Anytime you have UNPROTECTED vaginal, anal, or oral sex YOU ARE AT RISK for HIV.

Anytime you share needles or have unprotected sex with someone who is/was an IV drug user - YOU ARE AT RISK for HIV.

**What's safer sex?**

Safer sex means preventing your partner's blood, semen or vaginal secretions from entering your mouth, vagina, or anus. The best way to do this (besides abstinence) is by properly using latex condoms or other barrier protection (such as [dental dams](#)) every time you engage in sex. Use protection. Using lubricants like petroleum jelly, Vaseline, and baby oil, can damage latex condoms, and place you and your partner at risk for HIV infection.

**How do I know if I have HIV?**

Get tested! There is no test for AIDS, only a test for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Immediately after infection, *some* people *may* develop mild, flu-like symptoms (fever, headache, to name a few). However, even if you look and feel healthy, you should still get tested. Frequent testing is the only definitive way of knowing your HIV status!

**I feel fine. Why should I get tested?**

Just because you feel fine does not mean that you should not get tested. It isn't unusual for someone to be infected by HIV and not exhibit any of the symptoms of an HIV infection. Here are some other reasons why you should get tested:

- if you're in the early stages of infection, you can take steps to protect your long-term health;
- if you test positive, you can start to take measures to protect others from being infected;
- if you are pregnant and test HIV positive, medication and other precautions may reduce the risk of infecting your child.

### **How can I get tested?**

There are many places for you to [get tested](#). Most people get tested by their private doctors; at local health department facilities; or in hospitals. Some states offer anonymous HIV testing. Also, it's important for you to know that there are laws designed to protect your rights when it comes to HIV testing. [Know your testing rights](#).

### **Do I need to get tested more than once?**

Yes. If you are sexually active you should be tested for HIV regularly. It is recommended that you be tested every 6 months after your last possible exposure. Most blood tests are able to detect HIV within four weeks of initial exposure, but it can take as long as three to six months for HIV to be found. During the 6 months between exposure and the test, it is important to protect yourself and others from further possible exposures to HIV. Testing should never take the place of prevention.

### **What happens if I test positive?**

If you test positive for HIV, follow these important steps immediately to protect your health:

- See a doctor, even if you do not feel sick - preferably a doctor who has experience treating individuals with HIV. There are many drugs that treat HIV infection and help you to maintain your health, thus delaying the onset of AIDS, the disease caused by HIV.
- Get tested for [tuberculosis](#) (TB). Undetected TB can cause serious illness, but it can be successfully treated if caught early.
- Don't smoke cigarettes, drink too much alcohol, or use drugs. These can weaken your immune system and allow the virus to duplicate itself more rapidly. If necessary, find programs to help you reduce or stop using these substances.

- **Sources Cited**

**60 million people have genital herpes and each year 500,000**

“An Introduction to Sexually Transmitted Diseases.” Fact Sheet. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, National Institutes of Health. July 1999. Accessed February 10, 2003.

<http://www.niaid.nih.gov/factsheets/stdinfo.htm>

- **Glossary Items**

**Oral-genital**

Need Definition

**Dental dams**

Need Definition

**Tuberculosis**

A bacterial infection caused by Mycobacterium tuberculosis. TB bacteria are spread by airborne droplets expelled from the lungs when a person with active TB coughs, sneezes, or speaks. Exposure to these droplets can lead to infection in the air sacs of the lungs. The immune defenses of healthy people usually prevent TB infection from spreading beyond a very small area of the lungs. If the body's immune system is impaired because of HIV infection, aging, malnutrition, or other factors, the TB bacterium may begin to spread more widely in the lungs or to other tissues. TB is seen with increasing frequency among HIV-infected persons. Most cases of TB occur in the lungs (pulmonary TB). However, the disease may also occur in the larynx, lymph nodes, brain, kidneys, or bones (extrapulmonary TB). Extrapulmonary TB infections are more common among persons living with HIV.

See also: *Multiple Drug Resistant TB*.

**Multiple Drug Resistant TB**

Need Definition

- **STOP The Silence Website Elements**

**HERPES**

**Genital Herpes**— is a lifelong viral infection. An estimated [60 million people have genital herpes and each year 500,000](#) people get symptomatic herpes (they exhibit physical signs of the virus). However, most people show no signs. If you get symptoms, you will notice them in 2 to 20 days after having sex with an infected person. Symptoms include a burning sensation in the genitals, lower back pain, and painful urination, and flu-like symptoms. A few days later, small, red bumps appear in the genital area. Later these bumps can develop into painful blisters which will eventually crust over, scab, and heal. You can get and spread herpes through oral, anal and vaginal sex.

**GET TESTED**

See STOP The Silence, “The Hook UP”

**KNOW YOUR TESTING RIGHTS.**

See STOP The Silence, “Know Your Testing Rights”