



# HIV/AIDS

HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. AIDS stands for acquired immune deficiency syndrome. It is caused by HIV. The virus destroys the body's immune system. This leaves a person unable to fight off diseases. The virus also attacks the central nervous system causing mental disorders.



## SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

When first infected with HIV, many people have no symptoms. Within a month or two, some persons have flu-like symptoms (e.g., fever, fatigue, headache, and swollen glands). These symptoms usually go away within a week to a month. They are often mistaken for other infections. In adults, symptoms of HIV may take months to 10 or more years to appear. In children born with HIV, symptoms appear within 2 years.

### Symptoms of HIV Before the Onset of AIDS

- Fatigue; weight loss.
- Swollen glands.
- Fever and sweating. (These occur often.)
- Skin rashes that persist; flaky skin.
- Getting sick often.
- Short-term memory loss.
- Infections, such as herpes, shingles and yeast infections.



### In Women, Signs that HIV Could be Present:

- Chronic vaginal yeast infections.
- Abnormal Pap test from HPV exposure in the past.
- Cervical cancer.
- Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID).
- Some sexually transmitted infections, such as human papillomavirus (HPV). {Note: HPV can be present without HIV. Testing confirms its presence.}

### Symptoms of AIDS

AIDS is the most advanced stage of HIV. With AIDS, there is a low level of cells in the blood called T4 cells. People with AIDS get many illnesses. These include skin infections, pneumonia and cancer. These conditions are what lead to death. Symptoms include:

- Extreme fatigue; weight loss.
- Severe and chronic diarrhea.
- Fever, severe headaches.
- Shortness of breath, coughing, a hard time swallowing.
- Abdominal cramps, nausea, vomiting.
- Lack of coordination, vision loss.
- Mental status changes.
- Seizures, coma.



## CAUSES & RISK FACTORS

HIV is spread when body fluids, such as semen or blood, pass from an infected person to another person. This includes having sex without a latex or polyurethane condom and/or sharing drug needles.

Many health groups advise getting tested for HIV as a routine part of medical care. All pregnant women should be tested for HIV. Infected females can give HIV to their babies during pregnancy, delivery and breastfeeding. The risk of the baby getting HIV is greatly lowered if the mother takes antiviral medicines during the pregnancy and delivery. The baby takes medicine the first six weeks of life, too.

### High Risk Activities for HIV Infection

HIV is spread mainly by having anal or vaginal sex with someone who has HIV without using a condom or taking medicines to prevent or treat HIV. Or, by sharing needles or syringes, rinse water, or other equipment (works) with someone who has HIV when injecting drugs. Higher risk situations include having sex:

- When drunk or high when judgment is impaired.
- With multiple or casual sex partners or with a partner who has had multiple sex partners.
- With a partner who has used drugs by injection.
- When you or your partner has signs and symptoms of a genital tract infection.

Less common is for HIV to be passed from mother to child, or by being stuck with an HIV-contaminated needle. It is extremely rare for HIV to be passed through oral sex or receiving blood transfusions, unless received prior to 1985. Also extremely rare is through deep, open-mouthed kissing when both partners are HIV-positive and have mouth sores.

Blood screening tests are also done on donated blood, which makes it highly unlikely that you'd get HIV from current blood transfusions. You cannot get HIV from:

- Donating blood.
- Casual contact, such as touching, holding hands, hugging, and dry kissing.
- A cough, sneeze, tears or sweat.
- An animal or insect bite.
- A toilet seat, using a hot tub or swimming.

## DETECTION

A rapid oral HIV test and blood tests detect antibodies to HIV. Get tested for HIV at doctors' offices or clinics. Or, use FDA-approved home test. Learn more at [cdc.gov/hiv/basics/hiv-testing/hiv-self-tests](https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/hiv-testing/hiv-self-tests).



## TREATMENT

There is no cure for AIDS. Treatment includes:

- Medications. (Multi-drug combinations are used.)
- Measures to reduce the risk of infections and diseases (e.g., rest, proper nutrition, and vitamin supplements, as advised).
- Emotional support.
- Medical treatment for infections and chronic problems.





## TRIAGE QUESTIONS



Have you tested positive for HIV?

**NO**  
↓

**YES** ➔ **SEE DOCTOR**



Do you have one or both of these problems?

- A sexually transmitted infection (STI).
- Persistent yeast infections in the mouth (thrush) or vagina.

**NO**  
↓

**YES** ➔ **SEE DOCTOR**



Have you been told that a present or past sexual partner has HIV, with whom you have had sexual relations without using condoms?

**NO**  
↓

**YES** ➔ **SEE DOCTOR**  
Or Health Department for HIV Testing



Do you do the high-risk activities for HIV infection listed in this article?

**NO**  
↓

**YES** ➔ **SEE DOCTOR**  
Or Health Department for HIV Testing



Do you want to get tested for HIV just for “peace of mind?”

**NO**  
↓

**YES** ➔ **SEE DOCTOR**  
Or Health Department for HIV Testing



**USE SELF-CARE**



## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

HIV.gov  
800-HIV-0440 (448-0440)



## SELF-CARE / PREVENTION

Someday, a cure for HIV/AIDS may exist. For now, prevention is the best protection. Take these steps:

- Unless you are in a monogamous relationship in which you and your partner are HIV-free, use latex or polyurethane condoms every time you have sex. Look for condoms with “prevent disease” on the label.
- Don’t have sex with people who are at high risk for HIV. These are:
  - Persons with multiple sex partners.
  - Persons who inject illegal drugs.
  - Partners of persons infected or exposed to HIV.
  - Persons who have had multiple blood transfusions, especially before 1985, unless tested negative for HIV.
- If you’ve had sex with someone you suspect is HIV positive, see your doctor.
- Don’t share personal items that have blood on them, such as razors.
- Don’t share needles with anyone. This includes illegal drugs, like heroin, as well as, steroids, insulin, etc.
- Ask specific questions about your partner’s sexual past (e.g., have they had many partners or unprotected (no condom) sex?). Ask if they have been tested for HIV and if the results were positive or negative. Be aware that the response may not be an honest one. Protect yourself and get tested for HIV. Ask your partner to get tested, too. If you have been exposed to HIV, use prevention measures or avoid sex until you get tested for it.
- Plan ahead for safer sex. Decide what you’ll say and be willing to do with a potential sex partner.
- Keep a supply of condoms handy (e.g., in your purse, by the bed, in your pocket, etc.). Know the correct way to use them.
- Don’t have sex when your judgment is impaired, such as while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Avoid sex if either partner has signs and symptoms of a genital tract infection.
- Ask your doctor about taking daily medications that can reduce your risk of getting HIV, such as PrEP.