
HIV/AIDS

What You Need to Know



What is HIV?

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) damages cells in the immune (defense) system that helps to protect us by fighting off infection and disease. As the virus gradually destroys these cells, the immune system becomes unable to protect against illness.

What is AIDS?

Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is the last stage of HIV infection. AIDS is caused by HIV, which weakens the immune system over a period of time. However, a positive HIV test result alone does not mean that a person has AIDS. A diagnosis of AIDS is made on the basis of the person's symptoms and results of lab tests.

How is it spread?

Getting HIV infected blood, semen, or vaginal fluids into your body in any way can put you at risk. This includes having unprotected anal, oral or vaginal sex and sharing needles or drug works. You can't tell by looking at a person if they have HIV. An infected woman can spread the virus to her baby during pregnancy, delivery or through breast milk. However, with proper treatment the chance of passing the virus from the mother to the newborn baby is greatly reduced.

You cannot get the virus from:

- Casual contact with people who have HIV
- Tears or saliva
- Handling objects that have been touched by someone who has the virus
- Donating blood
- Mosquito bites

What are the symptoms?

Most people do not feel ill for an average of 8 to 10 years after being infected with the virus. The following symptoms can be caused by HIV:

- Constant tiredness
- Persistent fever
- Swollen glands
- A dry, nagging cough and/or shortness of breath
- Continued loss of appetite
- A large weight loss without dieting
- Diarrhea that won't go away
- Sores or rashes that won't go away
- Chronic yeast infections
- Night sweats
- Changes in memory or vision
- Unusual or persistent infections

How is it treated?

There are medical treatments that can slow down the rate at which HIV weakens the immune system. There are also treatments that can prevent or cure some of the illnesses associated with AIDS. These treatments have prolonged the lives of people with HIV and improved their quality of life. Early detection offers more options for treatment and care.

Who should be tested?

Get an HIV test if any of the following applies to you:

- Share needles for injecting drugs or had sex without a condom with someone who has shared needles.
- Know or suspect that your sex partner(s) have had multiple partners, used injection drugs, or had sex with prostitutes.
- Have a sexually transmitted disease (STD) or have had sex without a condom with someone who has a STD.
- Have hemophilia or have had sex without a condom with a person with hemophilia.
- Had a needle stick or other exposure to blood.
- Had anal, vaginal or oral sex without a condom.
- Received a blood transfusion between January 1978 and June 1985.
- Are pregnant (it is best to be tested before getting pregnant, if you have any of the above risks).
- Had sex with a prostitute or if you have more than one sexual partner.

How can HIV infection be prevented?

- Use a new, latex condom with a water-based lubricant every time you have sex. Condoms don't offer 100% protection but they do offer the best protection we have.
- Have sex with only one person who is having sex only with you.
- Know your sex partner's history of STDs and drug use.
- Have regular STD exams and HIV tests if you are sexually active.
- Know your HIV status and the status of your partner(s). Consider being tested before having sex.
- Remember, you won't automatically be tested for HIV when you go for a medical exam. Ask to be tested if you're at risk.
- If you are a health care worker, follow routine barrier precautions, and handle needles and other sharps safely.
- Don't share needles, toothbrushes, eating utensils or razors that could be contaminated with blood or body fluids.
- If you are thinking about getting a tattoo or body piercing, remember that you can get infected if the tools haven't been cleaned properly, or if the artist doesn't wear clean gloves with each new customer.

Where can I get tested?

The Health Division's HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Program provides confidential, anonymous counseling and testing, as well as referral services.



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The Oakland County Health Division will not deny participation in its programs based on race, sex, religion, national origin, age or disability. State and federal eligibility requirements apply for certain programs.