

AIDS and HIV

What is AIDS?

AIDS stands for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome.

AIDS is a chronic, life-threatening condition caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). AIDS is the name given to the later stages of an HIV infection.

HIV damages your body's immune system and interferes with your body's ability to fight off viruses, bacteria and fungi that cause disease.

Any person of any age, race, sex or sexual orientation can be infected with HIV / AIDS.

There is **no cure** for AIDS. While progress has been made, and treatment is available, prevention is our only defence.

Those at high risk should be tested regularly.

How do I know if I am infected?

HIV is identified by testing your blood for the virus antibodies.

HIV tests are not accurate right after infection because it takes time for you to develop these antibodies. It can take 6-12 weeks after infection for the antibodies to show.

What if I am infected?

After infection, people may not feel or look sick for years. Even if there are no symptoms, HIV can be passed to others.

Over time, the immune system becomes damaged and HIV-infected people become sick with different illnesses.

For people with advanced HIV infection or AIDS, their immune system is weak. They get diseases, such as infections or cancers that can be fatal.

Risk factors

- Unprotected sex with multiple partners. Unprotected sex means having sex without using a new condom every time.
- Unprotected sex - vaginal, oral and/or anal with someone who is HIV-positive.
- Sharing needles and other drug paraphernalia (e.g. crack pipes).
- Received infected blood or blood products before 1985. In Canada, blood and blood products are tested for HIV antibodies.
- During pregnancy, at birth or through breastfeeding, an infected mother can pass the virus to her child.

No risk

- Avoid sex or using needles.
- If you and your partner are not infected, only have sex with each other.

Some risk

- Safer sex activities
- Safer needle use

What are safer sex activities?

Safer sex activities prevent contact with semen, vaginal fluids or blood. Talk to your partner about safer sex before having sex.

- Use a latex condom correctly every time you have sex.
- Use water-based lubricants only. Oil-based lubricants such as petroleum jelly may weaken the condom and cause it to break.

What is safer needle use?

- Do not share needles or other drug paraphernalia.
- Use needle exchange programs and trade used needles for new ones.



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Revised 03.26.2010