


HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. HIV is a virus that attacks and weakens the immune system. The immune system is the body's defense against infections.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)

If you are infected with HIV, you are said to be “HIV-positive.” Over time as HIV weakens your immune system, you are more likely to get other infections. The late stage of HIV infection is known as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). With medicines, the virus can be controlled so AIDS may not occur.

HIV is NOT spread by:

- ▶ Tears
 - ▶ Urine
 - ▶ Sweat
 - ▶ Saliva
 - ▶ Feces
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How is it spread?

Each year in the U.S. about 50,000 people get infected with HIV. More than 1.2 million people in the U.S. are living with HIV infection and approximately 13% are not aware they are infected. Men account for 76% of all adults and adolescents living with HIV. The HIV virus is found only in certain body fluids:

- ▶ Blood.
- ▶ Vaginal fluid.
- ▶ Semen.
- ▶ Breast milk.

You can't tell if a person is HIV infected by looking at them.

Contact with infected body fluids can spread HIV by:

- ▶ Sexual contact.
 - Vaginal and anal sex.
 - Sharing unclean sex toys.
 - Oral sex, very rarely.
 - Body fluids with HIV can enter tiny breaks or rips in the linings of the rectum or mouth. Rips and tears may not be seen or felt.
- ▶ Needle sharing:
 - Used or unclean needles.
 - During illegal drug use.
- ▶ Breast feeding:
 - HIV can be spread to babies and others who drink breast milk from a woman who is HIV positive.
- ▶ Pregnancy and birth:
 - HIV-positive women can spread the virus to their babies during pregnancy and birth.

HIV is rarely spread from a blood transfusion because:

- ▶ All donated blood is tested for HIV.
- ▶ There is no risk of getting HIV when donating blood.

What are signs of HIV?

Most people with HIV will not show signs of HIV until years after getting the virus. Those who have been infected with HIV may have:

- ▶ Fever.
- ▶ Chills.
- ▶ Night sweats.
- ▶ Headache.
- ▶ Sore throat.
- ▶ Swollen lymph nodes, mainly on the neck.
- ▶ Tiredness.
- ▶ Rash.
- ▶ Sores or infections in the mouth.
- ▶ Body aches.

How do you know if you have HIV?

The only way to know you have HIV is by getting an HIV test. Routine HIV testing is recommended for all adults. HIV tests are offered by health care providers (HCP) in doctor's offices, hospitals, local public health departments, and in local clinics. Most HIV tests use either blood or saliva. HIV tests are very accurate but may not show HIV from a recent infection. Always discuss your test result and retesting with your test provider.

VA offers HIV testing and treatment to all enrolled Veterans.

How is it treated?

There is no cure for HIV. But there are medicines to help your body fight HIV. Your HCP can help you choose which to take and when to start. Treatment is lifelong. It can:

- ▶ Reduce the amount of virus in your body.
- ▶ Reduce the spread of HIV to others.
- ▶ Help most people with HIV live longer and healthier lives.

The sooner you know if you have HIV, the sooner your HCP can know when you will need treatment.



What can happen if you have HIV for a long time?

If HIV is not diagnosed and treated, it can progress into AIDS. AIDS stands for acquired immunodeficiency syndrome. AIDS is the late stage of HIV infection. When you have AIDS, the virus has greatly weakened your immune system. If HIV is not treated, other infections can occur that can be life threatening. The only way to know if you have AIDS is through a medical exam and testing by your HCP. Signs of AIDS are:

- ▶ Rapid weight loss.
- ▶ Fevers.
- ▶ Night sweats.
- ▶ Extreme tiredness.
- ▶ Swelling of the lymph nodes in the armpits, groin, or neck which doesn't go away.
- ▶ Diarrhea that lasts for more than a week.
- ▶ Sores of the mouth, anus, or genitals.
- ▶ Infections such as pneumonia, tuberculosis, and certain cancers.
- ▶ Red, brown, pink, or purplish blotches on or under the skin or inside the mouth, nose, or eyelids.
- ▶ Depression.
- ▶ Memory loss and other brain or nerve problems.

If you have HIV:

- ▶ See a HCP regularly.
- ▶ Take medicines as prescribed.
- ▶ Tell current and recent sex partners that you have HIV.
- ▶ Avoid spreading HIV to others by:
 - Using condoms during all sexual contact.
 - Not sharing used or unclean needles and sex toys.

How can you avoid HIV?

The best ways to avoid HIV are:

- ▶ Not having sexual contact.
- ▶ Using condoms during all sexual contact.
- ▶ Not using or injecting illegal drugs. If you do, use a new sterile needle and drug equipment each time to prep and inject drugs.

Other ways to avoid HIV are:

- ▶ Having less sex partners.
- ▶ Have sex with only one partner:
 - Who does not have HIV.
 - Who does not have sex with others.

- ▶ Not reusing or sharing needles or drug equipment (works).
- ▶ If unused (new) needles and sterile works are not used:
 - Boil in water, or
 - Clean with bleach water and rinse with water before each use.

Ask your sex partners to test for HIV and other STDs



For more information, see *Safer Sex* on page 71

Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)

- ▶ PrEP is medicine taken daily. When used with safer sex practices it prevents HIV infection.
- ▶ Truvada® is the pill that is used for PrEP. It is more than 90% effective if taken as prescribed.
- ▶ Discuss PrEP with your health care provider if you:
 - Are sexually active.
 - Are an injection drug user.
 - Have one or more of these risk factors for HIV:
 - Inconsistent condom use.
 - High number of sex partners.
 - HIV-positive sex partner.
 - A recent STD, such as gonorrhea, chlamydia, or syphilis.
 - An HIV-positive injecting partner.
 - Sharing of injection equipment.
 - Commercial sex work.



Learn more:

Veterans Health Library:

http://www.veteranshealthlibrary.org/Encyclopedia/142,82145_VA

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA):

VA National HIV/AIDS Website; for Veterans and the Public

www.hiv.va.gov/patient/

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS):

HIV/AIDS Basics

www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

HIV Among Men in the United States

<https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/group/gender/men/index.html>

HIV/AIDS Basics

<https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/index.html>

Oral Sex and HIV Risk

<https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/risk/oralsex.html>

HIV Transmission

<https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/transmission.html>

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID/NIH):

What are HIV and AIDS?

www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/HIVAIDS/Understanding/Pages/whatAreHIVAIDS.aspx

Office on Women's Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:

<https://www.womenshealth.gov/mens-health/top-health-concerns-for-men/hiv-aids.html>