

Basic Facts About HIV and AIDS



HIV/AIDS Information Sheet

HIV stands for **Human Immunodeficiency Virus**

AIDS stands for **Acquired ImmunoDeficiency Syndrome**

HIV is a virus that attacks your immune system. Once the virus gets inside your body:

- You may not feel or look sick for years, but you can still infect others
- Over time, your immune system may grow weak and you can become sick with different illnesses.
- If left untreated, your immune system will no longer be able to defend your body from infections, diseases or cancers which can kill you. This is called AIDS.

There is no cure for HIV infection.

- There are some drugs that can slow down the disease so the infected person can stay healthier for a longer time.
- Drugs cannot get rid of HIV or cure AIDS.
- Protecting yourself against infection is your only defense.

You can be infected by HIV if:

- The virus gets into your bloodstream. It can enter your body through contact with the semen, vaginal fluid, or blood of person infected with HIV.

The virus can get into your bloodstream if:

- You have vaginal or anal sex with someone who has HIV, without using a condom.
- You have oral sex with someone who has HIV, without using a condom or a dental dam. A dental dam is a piece of latex used to cover the anus or vagina.
- You share needles to inject drugs with someone who has HIV.
- You share needles to tattoo or pierce the skin with someone who has HIV.
- You share sex toys with someone who has HIV.

A mother with HIV can pass it to her baby:

- when she is pregnant
- at birth
- when she breastfeeds

You cannot get HIV from:

- casual everyday contact, such as talking or eating with someone who is infected with HIV.
- Handshakes, hugs or kisses.
- Coughs or sneezes.
- Making a blood donation.
- Swimming pools.
- Toilet seats or water fountains.
- Bed sheets.
- Forks, spoons, cups, food.
- Insects or animals.

You can protect yourself.

Safer Sex means making sure that semen, vaginal fluids, or blood do not get into your body.

To practice safer sex, use:

- A latex condom correctly, every time you have vaginal or anal sex.
- A condom or dental dam every time you have oral sex.
- Only water-based lubricants with latex condoms. Oil-based lubricants, like Vaseline, can weaken a latex condom and cause it to break.

Safer Needle Use means that if you inject drugs, or tattoo or pierce you use a new or sterilized needle every time.

- Sterilization requires soaking in bleach for at least 30 seconds, followed by rinsing with water.
- Soap and water alone do not sterilize needles.

If you think you may have been infected with HIV you should be tested.

- You can be tested at your community health clinic.
- Testing is private and confidential.
- You can get more information from the doctor or nurse in your community.
- You can get more information from the NWT HIV/AIDS Hotline