

HIV/AIDS Frequently Asked Questions



HIV/AIDS Information Sheet

What is HIV/AIDS?

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus, which is the virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). The virus attacks the body's immune system, which is your defense against infections.

How is HIV/AIDS spread?

The virus is spread from an infected person to someone else when there is an exchange of body fluids such as blood, semen, or vaginal fluids.

This can occur during sexual intercourse or when needles are shared. A pregnant woman can infect her child at the time of birth, and afterward, during breastfeeding. Pregnant women are routinely tested for HIV.

How is HIV not spread?

HIV is not spread by everyday social contact. Touching, hugging and shaking hands with an infected person are safe. Pets and insects cannot spread HIV.

Some people worry that they can get HIV by donating blood, but this is not true. A new, clean needle is used every time.

Donated blood is always checked for HIV so the risk of getting it from a blood transfusion is very low.

How can I tell if I have HIV?

A simple blood test can tell you if you are infected with HIV. It's called the HIV antibody test. A positive test result means that you have been infected with HIV and that you can spread it to others. A negative result means that no antibodies to HIV were found in your blood at the time of testing. Most infections will be detected at three months, but HIV antibodies can take as long as six months to develop, so you may need to get tested more than once to be sure you don't have the virus.

AIDS is the last stage of HIV infection. Infected people may get infections such as an unusual and serious pneumonia, or certain types of cancers.

I think I could be infected with HIV. What should I do?

If you have taken chances, and are worried that you might be infected with HIV, go to a health clinic right away. The blood test for HIV will be done, and all your information will be kept private. A doctor or nurse can help you to understand about the test and ways to keep yourself safer.

If you have been exposed to HIV, then your sex partners and anyone with whom you have shared needles and syringes must be told that they also may have been exposed to the virus. They will have to be tested for HIV infection. Talk to the doctor or nurse about this - they can help.

How is HIV/AIDS treated?

There is no cure for HIV infection or AIDS at this time. The virus remains in the body for life. There are drugs that can slow the progress of HIV and can help those infected to live full and active lives for many years.