

HIV/ AIDS INFORMATION

What is AIDS?

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. It is a disease caused by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). HIV attacks the immune system which is the part of our bodies that protects us against infections and illnesses. People with AIDS become very ill and die because their bodies can't fight off diseases.

What is the difference between AIDS and HIV?

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. A person can be infected with HIV and not have AIDS or ever get AIDS. Once infected, the average time it takes to develop AIDS is about 10 years. For infants and some adults, this time may be much shorter, depending on the health of the immune system that fights disease. Symptoms may appear anywhere from a few weeks to many years after infection.

What are the symptoms of AIDS?

Symptoms of HIV/AIDS are similar to those of many other diseases. Only a medical doctor can diagnose AIDS. Common symptoms include fatigue, chills, night sweats, swollen glands, pink to purple spots on skin, white spots and sores in mouth, persistent diarrhea, weight loss of 10 pounds or more, a dry heavy cough, shortness of breath, and repeated serious vaginal yeast infection in women.

What behaviors increase the chance of getting AIDS?

You are at risk if you have oral, vaginal, or anal intercourse with a person infected with HIV, or share intravenous needles with an infected person. A pregnant woman who is infected can infect the unborn child. Anyone who had a blood transfusion between 1978 and 1985 may be at risk. Having had sex with multiple partners is also a high risk.

How can you protect yourself?

Abstain from oral, vaginal, or anal sex and do not have sex with anyone unless you know he/she is not infected. Use a condom every time you have sex. Abstain from sex with multiple partners. Use "universal precaution" guidelines to protect yourself at work or anywhere you may come in contact with blood, pre-seminal fluid, semen, vaginal secretions, or breast milk, regardless of whom the fluid comes from.

What is the AIDS test?

A blood test known as the HIV antibody test is the only way to know if a person is infected with the HIV virus. It takes 6 weeks to 6 months for a test to be positive once a person is infected. A positive test means the person is infected and can pass the HIV virus to someone else.

What types of close contact are safe?

HIV is not spread by touching, kissing, sneezing, coughing, sharing silverware, cups or plates with an infected person. You cannot get the virus from swimming pools, bathtubs, showers, toilet seats, drinking fountains or insect bites. It is completely safe to donate blood and it is very rare that someone gets HIV from a blood transfusion.

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Should I be concerned about getting AIDS?

Yes, if you have unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex with someone you don't know or if your partner is infected with HIV. You are also at risk if you or your partner shoot drugs, share needles, or have had a blood transfusion, organ transplant or hemophilia treatments between 1978 and 1985. You cannot tell if someone is infected by looking at them. If you are concerned about possible exposure, get HIV tested.

What is the difference between safe and safer sex?

Safe sex is not having oral, vaginal, or anal sex at all. Safer sex is using a condom every time you have sex.

How do condoms help?

Sex is a major way that bodily fluids such as blood, semen and vaginal secretions are exchanged between people. A latex condom prevents these fluids, which carry HIV, from being passed between partners.

How safe are condoms?

Condoms are not 100% safe, especially when they are not used every time or are used wrong. In order to get the best possible protection, you need to use a latex condom every time you have sex, and use it correctly. If you have questions about using a condom, talk to your nurse, doctor, pharmacist, health department, AIDS service organization, or call the national AIDS hotline (1-800-342-AIDS).

What do I need to know about condoms?

The most important thing to know is how to use a condom correctly. A condom may tear or break if used incorrectly. Use only latex condoms with a water-based lubricant. Animal skin condoms are available for those with latex allergies, however, they will not protect you against HIV infection. Remember, a latex condom must be used every time you have sex and used correctly to get the best protection.

What is partner won't use a condom?

Remind your partner that latex condoms add protection against spreading HIV, herpes, syphilis, and gonorrhea. They also help prevent pregnancy. Latex condoms can save lives. Make a choice; don't have sex without using a condom.

What is a spermicide?

A spermicide is a substance that kills sperm, however, their ability to kill HIV in the vagina during sex is uncertain. Spermicides alone should not be used for HIV protection.

Why is AIDS considered an epidemic?

Right now there are no medicines to prevent AIDS. The long period between contracting HIV and developing symptoms makes AIDS very difficult to control. Millions of symptomless people may be HIV positive and not know it. Unless we protect ourselves against AIDS, millions more will become infected and die. However there are many new medications on the market to treat HIV with once there is a positive test. These medications are being used to slow the disease process and boost the immune system response, which has been weakened.

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Summary

If you think you may have been exposed to HIV, it is of utmost importance to be tested. If positive, it is important to get treated early and closely follow the treatment regimen given. HIV tests are usually offered at no charge at public health clinics and, in most states, results are confidential. Keep yourself healthy. Make any lifestyle changes you need to make to promote overall health and well-being. Make sure you have a balanced diet, plenty of rest, and regular exercise and relaxation. Avoid straining your immune system. Avoid acquiring other sexually-transmitted diseases or using recreational drugs. Make sobriety a cornerstone of your healthy living, HIV-survival strategy.

And remember the importance of using universal precaution: Handwashing!!!!!!!!!!!!!!