HIV and AIDS: Are You at Risk?

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

CDC
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

What is HIV and how can I get it?

HIV—the **h**uman **i**mmunodeficiency **v**irus—is a virus that kills your body's "CD4 cells." CD4 cells (also called T-helper cells) help your body fight off infection and disease. HIV can be passed from person to person if someone with HIV infection has sex with or shares drug injection needles with another person. It also can be passed from a mother to her baby when she is pregnant, when she delivers the baby, or if she breast-feeds her baby.

What is AIDS?

AIDS—the **a**cquired **i**mmuno**d**eficiency **s**yndrome—is a disease you get when HIV destroys your body's immune system. Normally, your immune system helps you fight off illness. When your immune system fails you can become very sick and can die.

The first cases of AIDS were identified in the United States in 1981, but AIDS most likely existed here and in other parts of the world for many years before that time. In 1984 scientists proved that HIV causes AIDS.

What do I need to know about HIV?

Anyone can get HIV. The most important thing to know is how you can get the virus.

You can get HIV:

- By having unprotected sex—sex without a condom—with someone who has HIV. The virus can be in an infected person's blood, semen, or vaginal secretions and can enter your body through tiny cuts or sores in your skin, or in the lining of your vagina, penis, rectum, or mouth.

- By sharing a needle and syringe to inject drugs or sharing drug equipment used to prepare drugs for injection with someone who has HIV.

- From a blood transfusion or blood clotting factor that you got before 1985. (But today it is unlikely you could get infected that way because all blood in the United States has been tested for HIV since 1985.)

Babies born to women with HIV also can become infected during pregnancy, birth, or breast-feeding.

You can***not*** get HIV:

- By working with or being around someone who has HIV.

- From sweat, spit, tears, clothes, drinking fountains, phones, toilet seats, or through everyday things like sharing a meal.
- From insect bites or stings.
- From donating blood.
- From a closed-mouth kiss (but there is a *very* small chance of getting it from open-mouthed or "French" kissing with an infected person because of possible blood contact).

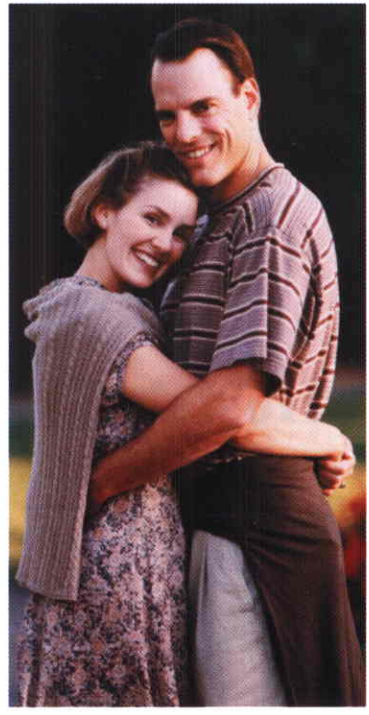
How can I protect myself?

- Don't share needles and syringes used to inject drugs, steroids, vitamins, or for tattooing or body piercing. Also, don't share equipment ("works") used to prepare drugs to be injected. Many people have been infected with HIV, hepatitis, and other germs this way. Germs from an

infected person can stay in a needle and then be injected directly into the next person who uses the needle.

- Don't have sex.

- Or, if you do make this decision, have sex only with one partner who you know doesn't have HIV and is only having sex with you. The more sex partners you have, the greater your chances are of getting HIV or other diseases passed through sex.



- Use a latex condom every time you have sex, including oral and anal sex. If you are allergic to latex, there is a polyurethane (a type of plastic) condom that you can try. There also is a condom that women can use to protect themselves. **Don't use lambskin condoms–they might not protect you against HIV.**

- Don't share razors or toothbrushes because of the possibility of contact with blood.

- If you are pregnant or think you might be soon, talk to a doctor or your local health department about being tested for HIV. Drug treatments are available to help you and reduce the chance of passing HIV to your baby if you have it.

How do I know if I have HIV or AIDS?

You might have HIV and still feel perfectly healthy. ***The only way to know for sure if you are infected or not is to be tested.*** Talk with a knowledgeable health care provider or counselor both before and after you are tested. You can go to your doctor or health department for testing or buy a home collection kit (for testing for HIV antibodies) at many pharmacies. To find out

where to go in your area for HIV counseling and testing, call your local health department or the CDC National AIDS Hotline, at **1-800-342-AIDS (2437)**.

Your doctor or health care provider can give you a confidential HIV test. The information on your HIV test and test results are confidential, just as your other medical information. This means it can be shared ***only*** with people authorized to see your medical records. You can ask your doctor, health care provider, or HIV counselor at the place you are tested to explain who can obtain this information. For example, you may want to ask whether your insurance company could find out your HIV status if you make a claim for health insurance benefits or apply for life insurance or disability insurance.

In many states, you can be tested anonymously. These tests are usually given at special places known as anonymous testing sites. When you get an anonymous HIV test, the testing site records only a number or code with the test result, not your name. A counselor gives you this number at the time your blood, saliva, or urine is taken for the test, then you return to the testing site (or perhaps call the testing site, for example with home collection kits) and give them your number or code to learn the results of your test.

You are more likely to test positive for (be infected with) HIV if you:

- Have ever shared injection drug needles and syringes or "works."

- Have ever had sex without a condom with someone who had HIV.

- Have ever had a sexually transmitted disease, like chlamydia or gonorrhea.
- Received a blood transfusion or a blood clotting factor between 1978 and 1985.
- Have ever had sex with someone who has done any of these things.

What can I do if the test shows I have HIV?

Although HIV is a very serious infection, many people with HIV and AIDS are living longer, healthier lives today, thanks to new and effective treatments. It is very important to make sure you have a doctor who knows how to treat HIV. If you don't know which doctor to use, talk with a health care professional or trained HIV counselor. If you are pregnant or are planning to become pregnant, this is especially important.

There also are other things you can do for yourself to stay healthy. Here are a few:

- Follow your doctor's instructions. Keep your appointments. Your doctor may prescribe medicine for you. Take the medicine just the way he or she tells you to because taking only some of your medicine gives your HIV infection more chance to grow.

- Get immunizations (shots) to prevent infections such as pneumonia and flu. Your doctor will tell you when to get these shots.

- If you smoke or if you use drugs not prescribed by your doctor, quit.

- Eat healthy foods. This will help keep you strong, keep your energy and weight up, and help your body protect itself.

- Exercise regularly to stay strong and fit.

- Get enough sleep and rest.

How can I find out more about HIV and AIDS?

You can call the CDC National AIDS Hotline at **1-800-342-2437** (Spanish/ Español: **1-800-344-7432**; TTY access: **1-800-243-7889**). The Hotline is staffed with people trained to answer your questions about HIV and AIDS in a prompt and confidential manner. Staff at the Hotline can offer you a wide variety of written materials and put you in touch with organizations in your area that deal with HIV and AIDS.

On the Internet, you can get information on HIV and AIDS from the CDC Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention at **http://www.cdc.gov/hiv**. Other sources of information are the CDC National Prevention Information Network, **http://www.cdcnpin.org** or the HIV/AIDS Treatment Information Service, **http://www.hivatis.org**.

AIDS Quilt

For more information about living with HIV or AIDS, call:

Free referrals and information:

CDC National AIDS Hotline

English **(800) 342-AIDS (2437)**
[24 hours/day]

Spanish **(800) 344-SIDA (7432)**
[8 am-2 am EST]
(including STDs)

TTY **(800) 243-7889**
(Deaf and Hard of Hearing)
[Monday-Friday/
10 am-10 pm EST]

Free materials:

CDC National Prevention Information Network
(800) 458-5231
1-301-562-1098 (International)
P.O. Box 6003
Rockville, MD 20849-6003

Free HIV/AIDS treatment information:

AIDS Treatment Information Service (ATIS)
(800) 448-0440

Drugs undergoing clinical trials:

AIDS Clinical Trials Information Service (ACTIS)
(800) 874-2572

Social Security benefits:

Social Security Administration
(800) 772-1213
(You also may request a personal earnings and benefit estimate statement to help you estimate the retirement, disability, and survivor benefits payable on your Social Security record.)

Child Health Insurance Program
1-877 KIDS NOW
(1-877-543-7669)

CDC Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention Internet address:
http://www.cdc.gov/hiv

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