

HIV

Know the facts



*Answers to 10 important
questions about HIV/AIDS*

Illinois Department of Public Health

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What is HIV?

HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. HIV attacks the body's immune system. Persons infected with HIV are more likely to become ill from infections and disease that healthy persons usually can fight off.

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What is AIDS?

AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) is a disease you get when HIV destroys your body's immune system.

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How does someone get HIV?

HIV is found in the blood, semen and vaginal secretions of infected people and can be spread in the following ways:

- Having unprotected sex — vaginal, anal or oral — with an HIV-infected person (male or female)
- Sharing needles or injection equipment with an HIV-infected person to inject drugs, including hormones, insulin or steroids
- From an HIV-infected woman to her baby during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding

Before 1985, some people were infected with HIV through blood transfusions or use of blood products. Since 1985, blood products have been screened for HIV, so infection through a blood transfusion is extremely rare.

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What are the signs of HIV infection?

Some people infected with HIV may feel healthy. Others may have symptoms that include unexplained tiredness, swollen glands or lymph nodes, dry cough or shortness of breath (not from a cold), fever, chills or night sweats, unexplained weight loss, persistent diarrhea or unusual spots on the skin or in the mouth. Remember, these symptoms are common in other illnesses as well. If these symptoms don't go away, you should see a doctor.

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How long does it take to develop signs of HIV?

People with HIV can develop signs of infection anywhere from months to years after being infected. About half of the people with HIV develop AIDS within 10 years, but the time between infection with HIV and the onset of AIDS can vary greatly.

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Can you tell if someone is infected with HIV?

No. Many people with HIV show no signs of infection. However, being infected means HIV is in the body for the rest of their lives, and they can infect others if they engage in behaviors that can transmit the virus.

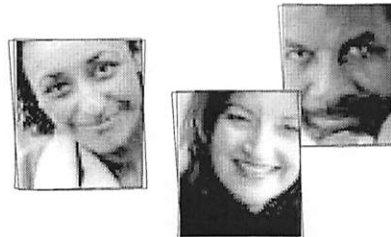
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What can I do to protect myself from HIV infection?

To avoid infection through sex, the only sure way is not to have sex — vaginal, anal or oral — or to have sex only with someone who is not infected and who only has sex with you. Using latex condoms correctly every time you have vaginal, anal or oral sex can greatly lower your risk of infection. If you use a lubricant, be sure it is water-based.

Avoid drugs and alcohol because they can increase your chances of infection and can lead to risky behaviors.

Never share needles or injection equipment. Sharing needles or equipment to inject drugs, hormones, insulin or steroids — even once — can transmit HIV. This is because HIV from an infected person's blood can remain in a needle or injection equipment and can then be injected into the bloodstream of the next person using the equipment.





Is there treatment for HIV infection?

There is no cure for AIDS and, once you have HIV, you are infected for life. If you are infected with HIV, the virus slowly weakens your ability to fight illness. There are, however, treatments and medicines that can help your body resist the effects of the virus. They slow the growth of HIV and delay or prevent certain life-threatening conditions.



Should I seek HIV counseling and testing?

The only way to tell if you've been infected with HIV is to be tested. You should consider taking an HIV test if —

- you are a man who has had sex with other men;
- you have shared injection needles or other equipment;
- you have had sex with one or more partners whose sex and drug-using behaviors are unknown to you;
- you have had sex with someone who is infected with HIV or who falls into one of the above groups; or
- you (or your partner) are pregnant or considering pregnancy (early treatment can help to protect babies of HIV-infected mothers from being born with HIV).

An HIV test can be done using either a blood or an oral specimen. Anonymous (no names) and confidential testing is available; it's your choice. It may be done at a doctor's office, a public health department, a community agency or an outreach testing site. Regardless of where you are tested, it is important that you discuss what the test means with a trained counselor both before and after the test is done. Call the Illinois HIV/AIDS & STD Hotline to find a test site near you.



A positive test result means you are infected. Knowing lets you make choices about how to protect your health, as well as the health of others. New treatments, too, can help you stay healthy longer.

A negative result usually means you are not infected. However, if you have engaged in any behavior that could spread the virus within three months of having the test, antibodies to the virus may not be detectable and you should be retested in three to six months to be sure you are not infected.

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Where can I get more information on AIDS and HIV testing?

Talk with your doctor or local health department. You also can call the Illinois Department of Public Health's toll-free HIV/AIDS & STD Hotline at 1-800-243-2437 or TTY (hearing impaired use only) 1-800-782-0423. Trained counselors are available seven days a week (9 a.m. to 9 p.m. on weekdays and 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on weekends) to answer your questions and to provide information.

HIV cannot be spread by -

- Giving blood
- Toilet seats
- Hot tubs
- Working with or being around someone with HIV
- Hugging
- Coughs or sneezes
- Shaking hands
- Sweat or tears
- Mosquitoes
- Simple (closed-mouth) kissing
- Eating food prepared or handled by an HIV-infected person

HIV/AIDS

Facts for Life

- ◆ AIDS is a disease caused by HIV (human immunodeficiency virus).
- ◆ Testing is the only sure way to know if you are infected with HIV.
- ◆ A person infected with HIV may have no symptoms but can still infect others.
- ◆ HIV is spread through unprotected sex with an infected person. Both men and women can spread HIV.
- ◆ To avoid HIV infection through sex, don't have sex, or have sex only with a partner who isn't infected and who only has sex with you.
- ◆ Using condoms correctly every time you have sex reduces the risk of HIV infection.
- ◆ HIV also is spread by sharing needles and injection equipment.
- ◆ An infected woman can pass HIV to her baby during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding.
- ◆ Donating blood is safe.
- ◆ HIV is not spread by hugs, handshakes or kisses.
- ◆ HIV is not spread by mosquitoes.
- ◆ There is no cure or vaccine for HIV. However, current treatments can keep you healthier longer.

