

HIV / AIDS

What is it?

The letters in AIDS stand for Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome. It is a very serious disease. You get AIDS from a virus called HIV, Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus. This virus harms your immune system, which protects you against infections. Since people with AIDS do not have this protection, they can get many different infections and cancers.

How can you get AIDS?

You can get AIDS only if the HIV virus gets into your body. The virus can be carried into your body in semen, the fluid from the vagina, or blood. People can get the HIV infection when they have sex or when they share injection needles or syringes. An infected mother can pass HIV onto her baby.

How can you not get AIDS?

You can not get HIV from other people except by contact with their blood or body fluids. Most HIV infections happen when you have sex or share injection needles with someone who is infected. Although it has not happened yet, it is possible to get HIV from sharing a razor or a toothbrush with someone who has HIV. You can **not** get HIV from touching, shaking hands, or hugging a person who has AIDS. You can **not** get HIV from pets or biting insects such as mosquitoes.

Some people think they may get the HIV virus if they donate blood. This is not true. The nurse who takes your blood uses a new needle for each person.

There is no contact with anyone else's blood when you give blood.

The blood that people give is always checked for HIV, so there is a very low of getting HIV from the blood given in a hospital.

Is kissing safe?

You cannot get HIV or AIDS from kissing. Deep kissing or "French kissing" is safe.

How can you tell if you have HIV infection?

There is a blood test for HIV. It is called the HIV antibody test. Persons testing for HIV can choose whether to use their names or initials for the test.

If your HIV test result is positive, it means you are infected with HIV.

If the test result is negative, it probably means you do not have HIV antibodies, but these can take three to six months to show up. So your test can be negative, and you can still have the virus if you have been infected recently. If there is a chance you have only recently been infected, the only way to be sure you do not have HIV is to have a second test six months after your first test.

AIDS is the last stage of the HIV infection. People who have AIDS may become very ill and die. But you can protect yourself against HIV and AIDS.

How can you protect yourself against HIV?

- Use a new condom every time you have sex, even oral sex.
- Do **not** have a lot of different sex partners.
- Do **not** share injection needles, syringes or other injection equipment.
- Do **not** share razors or toothbrushes.

Remember, if you take risks having sex, you can get infections, and you can pass on the infections to people who have sex with you *and* to their unborn babies. Protect yourself and others by having safe sex.

What should you do if you think you may have HIV or AIDS?

If you think you have symptoms, or if you took a risk having sex or using drugs, see your doctor or go to a STD clinic. You may need to have a blood test. If your blood test is positive, it means you have been infected with HIV, and you could pass it onto others. It does not mean that you have AIDS or that you will get it.

What can be done about it?

There is no cure for HIV infection or AIDS. The virus stays in your body. Doctors are using different medicines for the infections and illnesses that people with HIV may get, but there is no cure yet.

Inform your partner(s)

Since HIV is a reportable disease in British Columbia, it is important that your sex partner(s) and anyone you have shared needles with be notified if you have HIV. They will have to decide if they want to be tested for HIV infection.

You may want to tell them yourself. If you cannot tell them, then talk to the doctor or nurse. They can help to notify partners in a confidential manner so you do not need to reveal your test results to others.



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