

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HIV INFECTION

In the Clinic
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What Is HIV?

HIV is an infection that damages your immune system when undiagnosed and untreated. When the immune system is badly damaged, HIV develops into AIDS. There is no cure for HIV or AIDS, but safe and effective lifelong treatment is available. These medications, when taken regularly, can reverse damage to the immune system and allow patients to live a normal lifespan.

HIV is passed through body fluids, like blood, semen, and breast milk, in the following ways:

- By having anal and/or vaginal sex with an HIV-infected person, especially without a condom
- By sharing needles with an HIV-infected person
- By being stuck by a needle or sharp object contaminated with HIV
- From mother to child during pregnancy, birth, or breastfeeding

What Are the Symptoms?

Acute HIV usually occurs 2 to 6 weeks after infection. Symptoms include fever; tiredness; sore throat; swollen glands in the neck, armpits, and groin; and rash. Chronic HIV infection is the second stage. Symptoms may not appear again for many years but may include swollen glands in the neck, armpits, and groin; shingles; anemia; and chronic vaginal yeast infections. These symptoms are similar to those of other illnesses, like the flu or mono, making it difficult to diagnose HIV without testing.

Who Should Be Tested?

All sexually active persons aged 13 years or older should be tested at least once.

Anyone who requests HIV testing should be tested.

All pregnant women should be offered testing at least once during pregnancy and treated if positive to prevent transmission to the baby.

People who are at high risk for HIV may require more frequent testing, including:

- Men who have sex with men
- Men and women having unprotected sex with multiple partners, or those with a sexually transmitted infection or a partner with a sexually transmitted infection
- People who currently inject drugs or have in the past
- People who have sex for money, drugs, or other commodities
- People with past or current sex partners who have HIV, are bisexual, or inject drugs
- People who engage in receptive anal sex, regardless of sexual orientation

Routine testing should also be done in people diagnosed with tuberculosis or hepatitis B or C and survivors of sexual assault.



Can It Be Prevented?

Avoiding exposure to HIV-infected body fluids is essential for preventing infection. Regular condom use, clean needles, and general precautions in medical settings can prevent HIV infection.

If you are not infected but are at high risk, talk to your doctor about preexposure prophylaxis (PrEP), which involves taking HIV medicines every day and can prevent infection. If you are taking PrEP, you should be tested for HIV every 3 months.

How Is It diagnosed?

HIV infection is diagnosed with simple blood tests.

Talk to your doctor about which tests are right for you.

How Is It Treated?

You should start treatment with medications as soon as possible after diagnosis. Treatment involves a combination of medications known as antiretroviral therapy (ART). Before starting ART, you will need tests to check the health of your immune system and your risk for medication side effects. You must take ART for the rest of your life to prevent and reverse damage to your immune system. If your immune system has been significantly damaged, you may need additional medications to prevent other infections.

Talk to your doctor about other things you can do to stay healthy, such as eating nutritious foods, getting all recommended immunizations, and having routine cancer screening.

Questions for My Doctor

- What are the best strategies to prevent HIV infection?
- How will HIV affect my day-to-day life?
- What is the best treatment for me?
- Does the treatment have side effects?
- How can I avoid spreading HIV to others?
- How often should I see my doctor?
- Can I have sex if I have HIV?
- If I think I have been exposed to HIV, what should I do?

For More Information



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MedlinePlus

<https://medlineplus.gov/hivaids.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/index.html