

What is HIV?

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) attacks the body and makes the immune system weaker so that it cannot fight disease. When someone has the HI virus, they are said to be HIV-positive.

AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome)

After some time (usually 5-10 years) a person with HIV can get very sick and may have the following symptoms:

- Feeling tired and weak.
- Weight loss.
- Mouth infections.
- Skin changes and rashes.
- Lung diseases such as TB and rare kinds of pneumonia.

When a person with HIV starts to show these kinds of symptoms, we say the person has AIDS.



Just like diabetes and high blood pressure, HIV can be managed through healthy living and taking treatment. Treatment will work better if you take it at an early stage and do not wait until you are very sick.

How you get HIV

The virus is spread through all kinds of sexual contact (vaginal, anal, and oral), through blood to blood contact, and from mother to child through body fluids such as blood, vaginal fluids and breast milk.

Anyone who has unprotected sex can get HIV but you are at high risk if you:

- Have more than one partner.
- Use alcohol and drugs as this lowers inhibitions and increases risky sexual behaviour.
- Are in a relationship where money or goods are exchanged for sex as partners may not want to use condoms.
- Have other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- Use drugs and share needles with others.
- Have rough or dry sex which can cause cuts and bleeding, which allows the virus to pass into your body more easily.
- Are uncircumcised. Although male circumcision partially reduces the chances of men being infected with HIV, they should still use condoms every time they have sex.

HIV cannot be spread by touching others like hugging and shaking hands, surface contact (toilet seats etc) or through insect bites.

How to protect yourself and others from HIV

ABSTAIN - do not have unprotected sexual intercourse.

ALWAYS be FAITHFUL to your partner.

TEST and know your and your partner's status by talking about and testing for HIV at regular intervals.

You should know your status so that you can look after your health and protect other people in your life.

- When you are HIV infected you do not get sick right away, which means that you can spread HIV for many years before you come to know your HIV status.
 - You can't see when someone has HIV; only testing will tell you this.



Who should test?

- If you've ever had sex (vaginal, anal, oral) without a condom, or sex where the condom failed.
- If you've been exposed to somebody's blood without protection.
- If you are a drug user who has shared needles.
- If you are HIV-positive and give birth to a child without access to treatment you should take your child for an HIV test.
- Children who have been breast-fed by an HIV-positive person.
- If you have an STI (sexually transmitted infection).
- If you suspect you have TB.

CONDOMISE - always use a condom properly each time and for each round of sexual intercourse (vaginal, anal and oral).

Using condoms correctly

- Check the expiry date on the condom and if the date has passed do not use it.
- Check the packaging is not damaged. If the packaging has a hole or is torn the condom inside will probably be damaged too, so don't use it.
- Keeping a condom in your wallet or in your pocket is not a good idea because it can get heat damaged, especially after a long time. Store condoms in a cool place.
- Don't use butter, Vaseline, fish oil or any other oils as lubricant when using condoms as these may cause the condom to break.

- Only wear one condom. Don't wear two male condoms. And don't have sex with a male condom if the woman is using a femidom. Using two condoms could make the condoms burst.

Other reasons to test for HIV

If you have TB you need to also test for HIV as TB is very common in HIV-positive people and the earlier you know your HIV status, the better it is for your health. TB is completely curable if treatment is taken properly.

If you or your partner is pregnant make sure they are tested. An HIV-positive mother can protect her child and reduce the risk of her baby becoming infected with HIV by her and the baby taking antiretroviral drugs.

For more information: www.hivsa.com



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What YOU need to know about...

HIV and AIDS

