



HIV & AIDS

August 2008

While every effort has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the information in this publication, it cannot replace medical advice. Please visit a health professional if you have any concerns with your health. Included below is a list of places where you can get more information.

What is HIV & AIDS?

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. HIV is an infection that attacks the immune system and weakens the body's natural way to fight infections.

Without treatment, after some years, a person who has HIV can't fight off some infections and cancers. This stage of HIV is called AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome).

You can have HIV without having AIDS.

There is no cure for HIV. A person with it can pass HIV on to others for the rest of their life.

How do you get HIV & AIDS?

There are 3 main ways to catch HIV:

- Unprotected anal, vaginal or oral sex with an infected person. Unprotected sex is sex without using a condom or dental dam
- When infected blood gets into another person's bloodstream
- From an infected woman to her baby, during pregnancy or birth, or from breastfeeding.

Unsafe behaviours

The highest risk for both males and females is unprotected anal sex. Unprotected vaginal sex is also a risk.

Sharing injecting equipment, particularly needles and syringes, can put HIV directly into your bloodstream. You are also at risk if your sex partner shares injecting equipment, even if you don't.

Unprotected oral sex is a risk, particularly if the mouth or genital area has any cuts or sores.

How you can't get HIV & AIDS

You can't catch HIV from everyday social contact, such as shaking hands, sharing a glass, or hugging and kissing. Saliva, tears or sweat are not infectious.

You are not at risk in most work places and schools/colleges. However, where work, study or sport could include contact with blood and body fluids there may be some risk. Always follow basic hygiene; this includes proper hand washing, and safe handling of body fluids such as blood spills.

What are the signs and symptoms of HIV & AIDS?

Soon after being infected with HIV, some people feel as if they have the flu: fever, headache, tiredness and a rash. Others may not have any symptoms. That's why, if you could be at risk, an HIV test is the ONLY way to know if you've been infected.

People with HIV can feel and look healthy. Many don't realise they have it because they don't see or feel anything wrong. Without knowing it, they can pass HIV on to their partners.

As the virus keeps attacking the immune system, a person will develop symptoms of the disease. These include constant tiredness, swollen glands, rapid weight loss, night sweats, memory loss and diarrhoea.





These symptoms can last for a long time. When the immune system is badly damaged, cancers, other infections, and brain damage can occur. This is called AIDS.

How do I know if I have HIV & AIDS?

The only way to see if you have HIV is with a blood test. However, for a short period just after HIV enters the body, it can't be picked up with a test. So if your result is negative, you will need to have the test again after 3 months.

If you are having a test, you will be given counselling before and after to make sure that you fully understand what both a positive and a negative result mean.

The doctor will give you the test results face-to-face, not by phone or letter. All information about the test will be kept confidential (private).

If you do have HIV, all your sex partners will also need to be checked. This is always done carefully, respecting everyone's confidentiality.

What do I do if I have HIV & AIDS?

See your GP or doctor of choice as soon as possible if you think you may have HIV or AIDS.

How do I get treated?

Currently, there is no cure for HIV. However, the illness can be managed. Many people with HIV live for years, with daily treatment. This is why, if you are at risk, you need to get tested early.

Pregnant women can get treatment to reduce the chances of the baby getting HIV - you must tell your doctor if you're pregnant and have HIV.

There are services for people with HIV that provide medical, social, emotional and other forms of support - some are listed on the sexual health and blood-borne virus website.

How do I reduce the risks of getting HIV & AIDS?

The safest ways to protect against HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are to:

- Always practice safe sex. Safe sex means avoiding sexual contact where the semen, blood or vaginal fluids of one person passes directly into the body of another person. Try alternatives to penetrative sex, and ways to have sexual enjoyment, without putting yourself and your partner at risk
- Always use condoms and dental dams during sexual intercourse and oral sex. Condoms and dental dams, if used correctly with a water-based lubricant, help prevent fluids passing from one person to another. Always use a condom and dental dam until you are totally sure that both you and your partner do not have an STI
- Don't inject drugs. If you do, never share needles, syringes, filters, water or spoons. Wash your hands or swab your fingers before touching another person's injection site. Always use new, clean needles and syringes. You can get these from most chemists, needle and syringe exchange outlets, and at some country hospitals after hours
- Limit your sex partners. The fewer people you have sex with, the lower the risk of having sex with someone who has HIV. Have a long-term relationship where neither of you is already infected, and neither of you have other partners
- Before having any body art (such as tattooing or piercing) make sure the body artist uses only sterilised equipment, and new razors and needles each time
- Don't share personal items, such as razors, toothbrushes and dental floss
- Have regular STI check-ups
- Alcohol and other drugs can affect your sexual behaviour. If you are under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, it may be better to avoid sex.

Talking about STIs can be difficult, but any person you have sex with has a right to know if you have an STI. Discuss it when you are feeling relaxed and confident, not just before you have sex. Your partner will appreciate your honesty and that you don't want to infect him/her. You have the right to know if they are infected, too.





Where can I find more information on HIV & AIDS?

For further information contact:

Your GP or doctor of your choice

WA AIDS Council

9482 0000

<http://www.waids.com/>

Health Direct

1800 022 222

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http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/2/414/2/hivaids_fact_sh.pm

