



HIV ➤ An introduction

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1.1 Did you know?

- HIV is the virus that causes AIDS
- HIV/AIDS affects everyone regardless of age, gender, race, cultural background or religion
- Worldwide:
 - There are more than 34 million people living with HIV/AIDS. More than half of these are women and children
 - Sex between men and women is the most common way HIV is passed on (transmitted)
- In Australia:
 - There are more than 24,000 people living with HIV/AIDS.
 - HIV is mainly transmitted through sex between men, but transmission through sex between men and women is increasing.
- There are effective treatments for HIV and people can live long and healthy lives
- Using condoms during vaginal and anal sex, and not sharing needles or other injecting equipment remain the most effective ways to protect yourself from HIV.

1.2 What's the difference between HIV and AIDS?

HIV/AIDS is often written as one word with one meaning. However, HIV and AIDS are different things.

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. A person becomes infected with HIV (HIV positive) when the virus enters their blood stream.

HIV attacks the immune system, which is the body's defence against disease. If a person's immune system is severely damaged by the virus, they will develop AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). This means they are likely to get infections and illnesses that their body would normally fight off.

Being diagnosed with HIV does not mean a person has AIDS or that they are going to die. Treatments slow down damage to the immune system so that people with HIV can remain well, and live healthy and fulfilling lives.

1.3 How is HIV transmitted?

HIV is found in body fluids such as blood, semen, vaginal fluids and breast milk. Infection only occurs when body fluids from an infected person enter the blood stream of another person.

HIV **can** be transmitted by:

- Unsafe sex (sex without a condom)
- Sharing needles, syringes and other equipment for injecting drugs
- Unsterile body piercing or tattooing
- Mother-to-child during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding
- Blood transfusion and/or blood products in some other countries. **In Australia, blood transfusions and blood products are safe.**

HIV **cannot** be transmitted by:

- Coughing
- Sneezing
- Kissing
- Spitting
- Crying
- Sharing cutlery and crockery
- Bed linen
- Toilets
- Showers
- Insects such as mosquitoes.

1.4 How can I avoid getting HIV?

Sex

HIV can be passed on through invisible cuts and scrapes on the surface of the vagina, penis or anus during unprotected sex (sex without condom) with someone who has HIV.

To avoid transmission of HIV, practice **safe sex**:

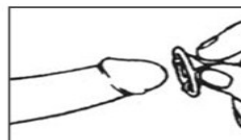
- Use a new condom and water-based lubricant (eg. KY jelly or Wet stuff) every time you have vaginal or anal sex. This also protects you from most other sexually transmissible infections.

How to use a condom

1. Open packet with care to avoid tearing the condom.



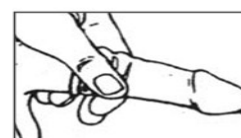
2. Squeeze the tip of the condom between your finger and thumb to remove air and roll the condom down the penis (pull back the foreskin if necessary before putting the condom on).



3. Once the condom is on the penis, cover it with water-based lubricant.



4. Hold the condom at the base of the penis when you withdraw to prevent semen spilling out.



5. Put the condom in the bin. Never re-use a condom.



Injecting drugs, body piercing or tattooing

HIV can be transmitted through sharing needles and syringes, and by having body piercing and tattooing done with used needles.

To avoid transmission of HIV when injecting drugs:

- Don't share needles, syringes or other injecting equipment.

To avoid transmission of HIV when having body piercing and tattooing:

- Go to a licensed studio (registered premises) where needles and other equipment are properly sterilised or discarded after use. This also protects you from other viruses such as hepatitis B and hepatitis C.

Mother-to-Child

HIV can be passed on from a HIV positive mother to her child during pregnancy, childbirth, or through breastfeeding. In Australia, women with HIV who are pregnant are given HIV treatment during pregnancy and have the baby by caesarean to avoid passing on HIV. If you have HIV, and you are pregnant or planning to have a baby, it is important to talk to your doctor as soon as possible.

It is recommended that mothers with HIV do not breastfeed. Speak to your doctor about other ways of feeding your baby.

Blood transfusions and blood products

In Australia, blood transfusions are safe. Donated blood and all blood products are checked for HIV and people who are HIV positive cannot donate blood. However, blood transfusions in some overseas countries may not be safe.

1.5 How can I find out if I have HIV?

You can find out by having a blood test. There are different types of tests available. Speak to your doctor about which one is best for you.

HIV tests are available free at sexual health clinics located across Australia. At the clinics, you do not have to give your name or have a Medicare card. You can also get the test(s) from your doctor.

Strict confidentiality is guaranteed at all times. In Australia, it is against the law for any health care professional to discuss your private information with others.

1.6 How do I know if someone has HIV/AIDS?

You can't tell 'just by looking' if someone has HIV/AIDS. Most people who have the virus look healthy and have no symptoms. In fact, many people who have HIV don't know it themselves. The only way to know is through a HIV test.

1.7 Travelling Overseas

HIV/AIDS is found in every country of the world. Wherever you travel, always use condoms and water-based lubricant when having sex (safe sex). Do not share needles or other injecting equipment. If you get a tattoo or body piercing, be sure the equipment is sterilised.

1.8 Using Interpreters

You can have an interpreter when you are talking with health care workers or other services.

Using an interpreter may help you to:

- Understand everything you are being told
- Ensure everything you say is understood
- Ask questions and get answers
- Give permission for tests or treatment.

Interpreters must protect your confidentiality.

Ask for an interpreter when you make an appointment with a health worker.

Telephone interpreters (TIS National) are available anywhere in Australia.

Call 131 450 (for the cost of a local call) to be connected with the service you want to speak to through an interpreter.

