



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...HIV/AIDS

What is HIV?

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus.

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) attacks the immune system, causing deficiency or damage in the immune system. HIV damages the body's ability to fight diseases and infections.

HIV infection leads to Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Without a healthy, functioning immune system, a person may become vulnerable to infections by bacteria, other viruses and disease-causing organisms. These infections may cause life threatening illnesses.

Medical treatment for HIV can delay the onset of AIDS, which is why it is important to know your status and receive treatment as soon as possible if you are HIV positive.

What is AIDS?

AIDS stands for: **A**cquired **I**mmuno**D**eficiency **S**ndrome.

A - Acquired – means that the disease is not hereditary. A person **acquires** AIDS after birth from contact with HIV.

I - Immuno- refers to the body's immune system, the immune system includes all organs and cells that work to fight infection or disease.

D - Deficiency – means that a person gets AIDS when the immune system is no longer working the way it should. Thus, immunodeficiency means that the disease is characterized by a weakening of the immune system.

Syndrome – refers to a group of symptoms that indicate or characterize a disease. AIDS is syndrome because it is an illness with a wide range of complications and symptoms.

AIDS refers to the most advanced stages of an HIV infection. It is a complex condition caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which damages the immune system and affects the body's ability to fight infection and disease.

How is HIV/AIDS spread?

HIV is spread primarily by:

- Not using a condom when having sex with a person who has HIV. All unprotected sex with someone who has HIV contains some risk. However:
 - Unprotected anal sex is riskier than unprotected vaginal sex.
 - Among men who have sex with other men, unprotected receptive anal sex is riskier than unprotected insertive anal sex.
- Having multiple sex partners or the presence of other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) can increase the risk of infection during sex. Unprotected oral sex can also be a risk for HIV transmission, but it is a much lower risk than anal or vaginal sex.
- Sharing needles, syringes, rinse water, or other equipment used to prepare illicit drugs for injection.
- Being born to an infected mother— HIV can be passed from mother to child during pregnancy, birth, or breast-feeding.

Who is at risk for HIV/AIDS?

Anyone of any age, race, sex or sexual orientation can be infected, but you're at greatest risk of HIV/AIDS if you:

- **Have unprotected sex.** Unprotected sex means having sex without using a new latex or polyurethane condom every time. Anal sex is more risky than is vaginal sex. The risk increases if you have multiple sexual partners.
- **Have another STI.** Many sexually transmitted infections (STIs) produce open sores on your genitals. These sores act as doorways for HIV to enter your body.
- **Use intravenous drugs.** People who use intravenous drugs often share needles and syringes. This exposes them to droplets of other people's blood.
- **Are an uncircumcised man.** Studies indicate that lack of circumcision increases the risk of heterosexual transmission of HIV.

How do I know if I have HIV/AIDS?

CDC recommends HIV screening for patients aged 13–64 years in all health-care settings. Go to a clinic or doctor to take a blood or oral test for HIV. Call the

number below to find a test center near you. If you have been exposed to someone with HIV/AIDS or you have symptoms that match those described below, your doctor may test you for HIV/AIDS.

What are the symptoms of HIV/AIDS?

The symptoms of HIV vary, depending on the individual and what stage of HIV you are in. In its beginning stage, HIV does not have unique symptoms and can be indistinguishable from the flu, so it is important to get tested regularly (e.g. annually, every three months). Regular testing ensures that you can detect HIV early and begin treatment as soon as possible.

How is HIV/AIDS treated?

Antiretroviral therapy (ART) is the use of HIV medicines to treat HIV infection. People on ART take a combination of HIV medicines (called an [HIV regimen](#)) every day.

ART is recommended for everyone infected with HIV. ART can't cure HIV, but HIV medicines help people with HIV live longer, healthier lives. ART also reduces the risk of [HIV transmission](#).

How can HIV/AIDS be prevented?

Abstinence (not having sex) is the best way to protect yourself from STDs and HIV/AIDS. If you have sex, using a latex condom (rubber) is the best way to protect yourself from HIV. Limit your number of sex partners. The more people you have sex with, the greater your chance of getting HIV. Don't share needles for drugs or tattoos. If you do share, use clean needles or works.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information and clinic locations call the National STD/HIV InfoLine at 1-800-342-AIDS.

This page was last reviewed on July 22, 2015.