

# Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) Fact Sheet

## What is HIV?

HIV is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) that damages white blood cells that are important in helping the body fight infection and disease. Anyone who has sex can be at risk regardless of age, race, gender, or sexual orientation. Some groups are at higher risk, such as gay or bisexual men and African Americans. You can be tested through a blood draw from the arm, or using rapid finger-poke method where you receive results in 20 minutes at the Lenawee County Health Department.

## How is HIV Spread?

- HIV is transmitted through body fluids such as blood, semen (cum), pre-seminal fluid (pre-cum), vaginal fluids, and breast milk. The most common way it is transmitted is through unprotected vaginal and anal sex. Although more rare, it is common to contract HIV through performing oral sex.
- Injection drug use is also a risk for HIV if needles, syringes, and other equipment are shared with someone who is infected. Reusing "spoons" and "cookers" (such as bottle caps, spoons, or water used to dissolve or heat drugs) also carries a risk for transmitting HIV and other blood-borne infections.
- An HIV-positive pregnant woman can pass HIV to her fetus before or during labor and through breastfeeding. All pregnant women should be tested for HIV.
- Healthcare workers exposed to infected fluids, most often through needle sticks, are also at risk of HIV. Those workers may benefit from taking antiretroviral drugs after exposure, called post-exposure prophylaxis or PEP. This is also used for those exposed through sexual assault, condom breakage, or sharing needles. It is most effective when used as soon as possible or within 72 hours of suspected exposure to HIV.
- People receiving blood transfusions or organ and tissue transplants, although this is **extremely rare** in the U.S.
- Also, having an STI increases your risk for contracting HIV

## Symptoms of HIV

- **Acute HIV infection:** Some people develop flu like symptoms early after infection, usually within a few weeks or up to a month after contact. Not everyone feels ill though, and symptoms might be mild. During acute HIV infection, there is a large amount of HIV in the blood, and the immune system is beginning to respond to the virus.
- **Latent or asymptomatic HIV infection:** After a few weeks, the level of HIV in the blood decreases and people enter a latent or asymptomatic (no symptoms) stage. During this stage (which can last 8 to 10 years) a person usually feels fine. The virus is still active, though, and can be transmitted to others.
- **Symptomatic HIV infection:** The immune system weakens and symptoms related to opportunistic infections begin to develop (these are infections that are more likely to occur in someone with a weakened immune system).
- **AIDS:** Untreated, virtually all cases of HIV will lead to AIDS. At this stage, the immune system is severely weakened and serious illnesses emerge. An AIDS diagnosis can be made when someone who has HIV develops an opportunistic infection and/or their CD4 count falls below 200 (this is the number or "count" of CD4 cells in a small sample of blood). A normal CD4 count is between 500 and 1000.
  - ◊ Symptoms might include extreme weight loss, chills and fever, night sweats, fatigue and weakness, sores of the mouth and genitals, diarrhea, and swollen glands. In addition, there are other infections that tend to occur that indicate AIDS .



# Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) Fact Sheet

## Reducing the Risk

Having unprotected sex is a high risk activity, so is having sex with multiple partners. If you are sexually active and want to reduce the risk of getting HIV, commit to a long-term mutually monogamous relationship (one person). Talk with your partner and get tested for HIV/STIs. You should know your partner's STI/HIV status. Also, correctly **using latex condoms or dental dams** (for oral sex) **every time** can help stop you from getting an STI infection. Do not use injection drugs; this increases your risk of getting HIV.

People who are at high risk of getting HIV but do not have HIV can take pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) daily medicines that can significantly lower the chances of getting HIV. PrEP can help keep the virus from establishing a permanent infection when someone is exposed to HIV. PrEP is less effective if it is not taken consistently but, even if some doses are missed, PrEP will still offer significant protection from contracting HIV. People who use PrEP must commit to taking the drug every day and seeing their healthcare provider for follow-up every three months. Talk to your healthcare provider to see if PrEP is right for you. PrEP should be used with other risk reduction strategies, including condoms.

## Treating HIV

HIV is treated with medication called antiretroviral therapy or ART. If taken as prescribed, HIV medication reduces the amount of HIV in the body (viral load) to a very low level, which keeps the immune system working and prevents illness. This is called viral suppression. HIV medication can even make the viral load so low that a test can't detect it. This is called an undetectable viral load.

- Listen to your healthcare provider, adhere to treatment plan, and take medications as directed
- Tell your provider about side effects
- Ask if there are vaccinations recommended for you
- Eat healthy foods, exercise moderately, and get plenty of sleep; relax and handle your stress
- Find support groups and counseling  
Talking about HIV is difficult, but it is the best thing you can do to help others protect their health. You should tell your sex partner(s) so they can get tested and treated, if necessary. You do not have to do this alone. Your local health department will usually contact partners and talk to them about testing for HIV.

More Information: <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/>

