

HIV

FACT SHEET

What is HIV?

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a virus that attacks your immune system. Your immune system helps you fight off illness. If your immune system fails, you can become very sick. Once the virus gets inside your body, you may not look or feel sick for years but you can still infect others. Over time, your immune system grows weak, and you can become sick with different illnesses. This is called **AIDS (Acquired ImmunoDeficiency Syndrome)**.

How Do You Get HIV?

You can get HIV by:

- having sex without a condom or oral dam with someone who has HIV
- exposure to blood and body fluids contaminated with HIV
- injection drug use (the virus can be spread by sharing or re-using needles and other injection equipment).
- receiving a transfusion of blood products (blood products have been tested for HIV since 1985)

An infected mother can pass the infection to her newborn child during the pregnancy and delivery and through breastfeeding.

The virus is **not** spread by casual contact such as hugging, kissing, sneezing, coughing or sharing food or drink.

What are the Symptoms?

Many people who have HIV feel healthy. The only way to know for sure if you are infected with HIV is to have a blood test. Your doctor can give you a confidential test, or you can be tested anonymously at an anonymous testing clinic. Call Public Health Services for information about the anonymous testing clinic closest to you. Counselling will be offered before and after the test is done.

What is the Treatment?

There is no cure for HIV infection or AIDS. There are many treatments that slow the damage done by the virus. Your doctor can discuss available treatments with you and can refer you to an HIV clinic.

How Can You Prevent HIV Infection?

- Do not share needles, razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers, sexual toys, etc.
- Limit the number of sexual partners. Use a latex condom and/or oral dam every time you have sex, including oral and anal sex.
- Wear gloves to clean up spills of blood of an infected person. Then disinfect the area with a freshly prepared mixture of 1 part household bleach and 9 parts water (1:10 solution).
- If you are pregnant or think you might soon become pregnant, ask your

doctor or Public Health Services about being tested for HIV. Drug treatments are recommended to help reduce the chance of passing HIV to your baby.

- Use only professional tattoo artists and body-piercing artists working in reputable salons.

People with HIV are legally required to tell all of their sexual partners that they are infected. They should also tell their doctors, dentists and dental hygienists. People with HIV should not donate blood, organs or semen.