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**Find Out How You Can Protect Yourself and Your Baby**



# #1 CHOICES, MOTHERHOOD AND HIV

*Find out how to protect yourself and your baby*

A combination of social, economic, environmental and physical factors contribute to putting women at risk for infection with HIV (the virus that causes AIDS). A woman's risk of getting HIV is affected by many things, including her level of education, quality of housing, her support systems and her overall self-concept.

## *Mind, Body and Spirit*

As women we take care of our husbands, partners, children, families, parents and friends. Often, we think about our own needs only after we have met everybody else's needs, or we begin to think about ourselves only when something has gone very wrong with us. As young girls our families and society taught us to behave this way. Many of us never knew that there were other options.

The best way to care for the people we love is to first take care of ourselves. We need to put our own needs first by looking after our minds, bodies and spirits. To be healthy, we must value ourselves enough to protect ourselves. This includes keeping ourselves aware of risks — such as HIV/AIDS — that can affect our health.

## *Mental and Emotional Health*

To protect our mental and emotional health we should keep informed about the world around us, and know the health and social issues that affect us as women. To keep ourselves informed we can:

**Gather with friends** and talk to each other about how we are doing and feeling. Share concerns and experiences. This is how we learn from each other.

**Keep a journal or diary.** If you feel safe, write down your feelings and thoughts. This is one way to release your thoughts.

**Laugh out loud — life can be funny.** Think positively and try to find humour in life. Laughter can be good medicine as it helps to relieve stress.

**Remember to breathe.** Deep breathing helps to relax the body and quiet the mind. Fill your chest and belly with air. Become aware of your breathing as you inhale more fully. Exhale, and feel the stress melt away.

### *Body Health*

We must take care of our physical health. Knowing when our bodies are healthy helps us to be aware when things have changed. If there are any changes we can then take the needed steps to maintain good health.

**Rest:** Adequate sleep and rest will allow your body to heal itself and allow you to be better able to cope with stress.

**Have an annual 'Pap' test, do regular breast self-exams, make sure you have a regular physical examination from your doctor.**

**Exercise. Walk,** go to the gym, dance or ride a bike. Try getting your heart to beat faster two or three times a week.

**Eat healthier foods.** Cut down on sugar, salt, coffee, chocolate, red meat, and alcohol. Eat more whole grains, vegetables, chicken, fish, soy products and herbal drinks. Eat something special that you really like — there are lots of good-tasting foods that are also good for us. Fruits that remind us of home can be a good place to start.

**Do something nice just for yourself:** get a massage, or do your hair. Know that you are worth it!



## *Spiritual Health*

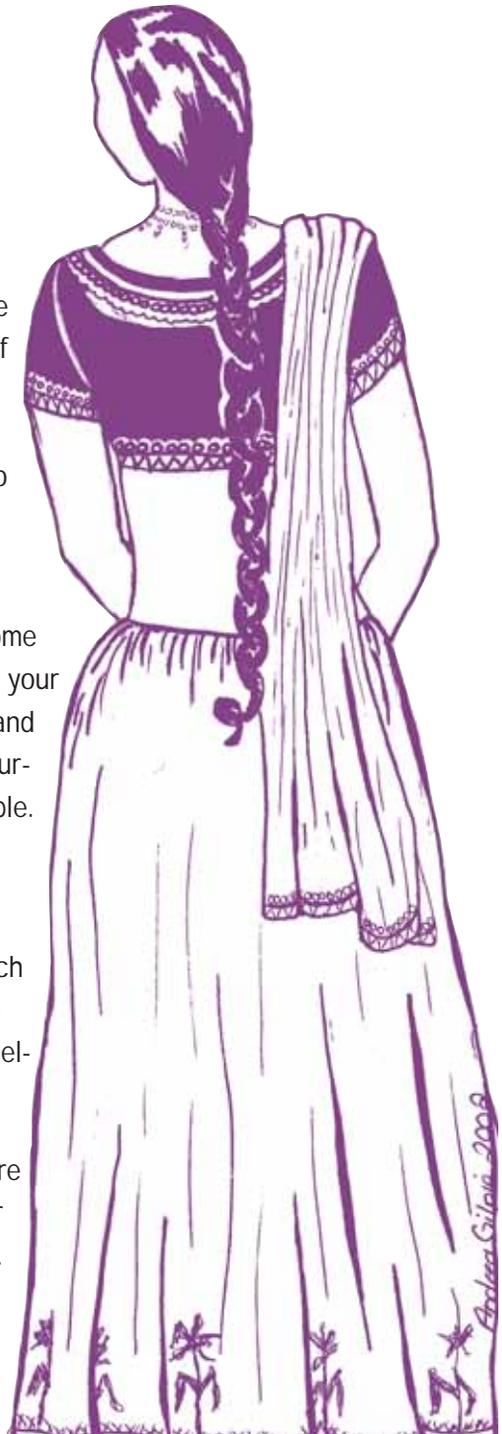
Love yourself.  
Identify a focus of concern.  
Give yourself a goal.  
Have confidence.  
Take action.

Take time to nurture strength of spirit. We all have a spirit. Our spirits are the part of us that know things deeply. This connection allows us to know when we are uncomfortable. Therefore it's important to take time to be aware of ourselves and maintain our connection with our spirit.

To nurture your spirit you need to take some quiet time. This time can be used to calm your mind and to listen to your own thoughts and feelings. Repeat positive messages to yourself that remind you that you are invaluable. Here is an example: "I love myself, I am important, I am valuable".

Remember also to take time to get in touch with your feelings. Take a few minutes to clear your mind and listen to your own feelings and thoughts.

When all parts of ourselves are taken care of, we are in balance. We are then better able to make good choices for ourselves.



## WOMEN, CHOICES, MOTHERHOOD AND HIV

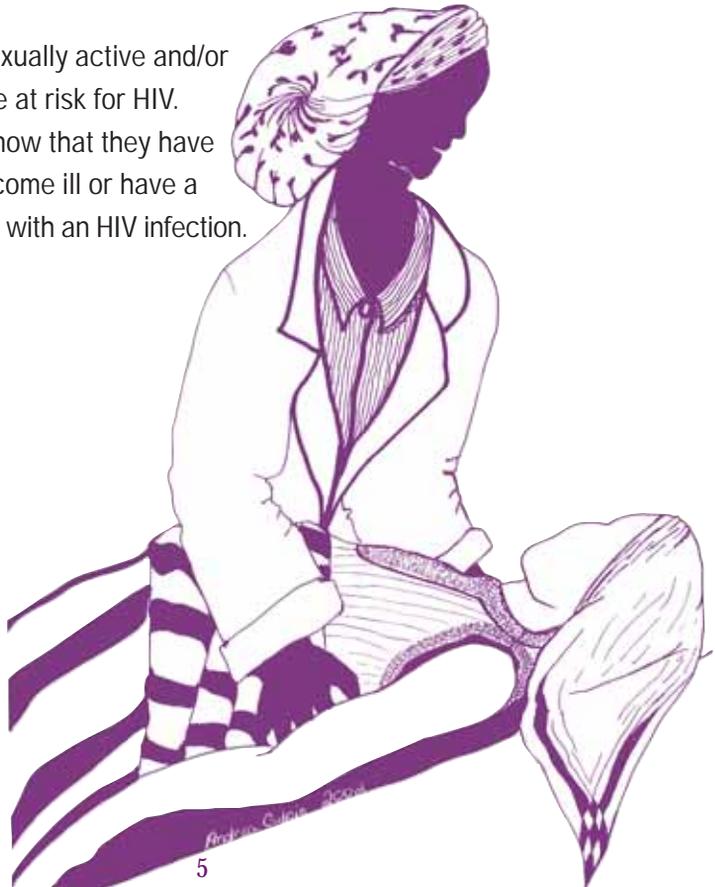
All women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy will have to decide whether or not they want to have an HIV test. An HIV test will tell women if they have the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. This virus has about a 25 per cent possibility of being passed on to your baby if you have HIV and are not treated during pregnancy and delivery.

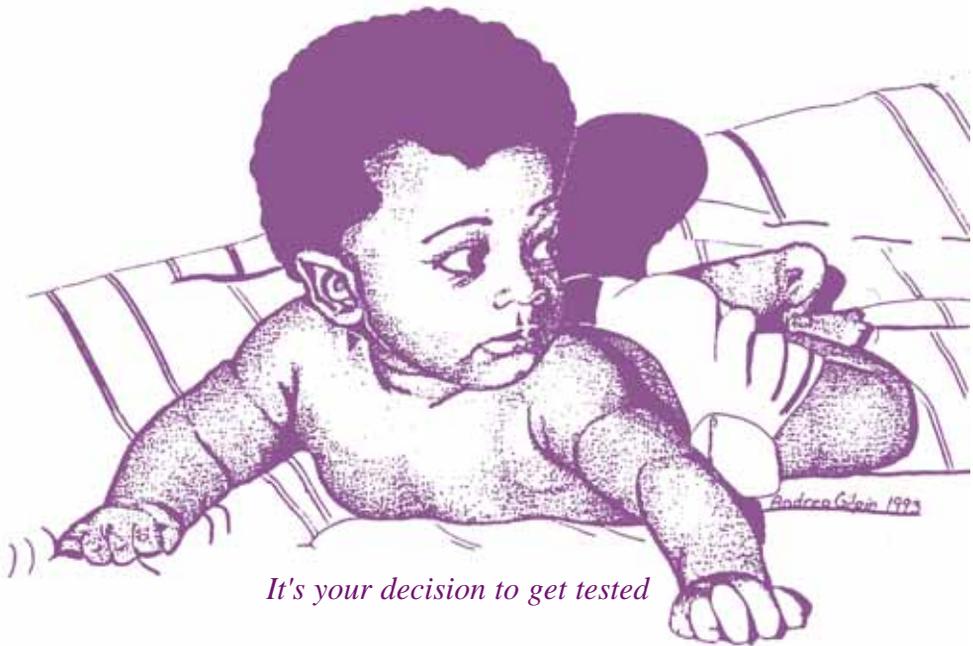
### *How do women get HIV?*

Women can get the virus by having unprotected sex with someone who has the virus or by sharing needles for injection drugs with someone who has the virus. The virus can be passed to babies from an infected mother during birth, breast-feeding or pregnancy.

### *Who is at risk for HIV?*

All women who are sexually active and/or use injection drugs are at risk for HIV. Many women never know that they have the virus until they become ill or have a child who is diagnosed with an HIV infection.





*It's your decision to get tested*

It is up to you to choose whether or not to be tested for HIV. You need to be aware that HIV/AIDS is a long and often deadly infection.

If you are tested and you find that you don't have HIV (you are 'HIV-negative'), this is a good time for you to get information about how to reduce your risk of infection and continue to avoid HIV.

If you are tested and you find out that you have HIV (you are 'HIV-positive') then you will need support. There are HIV drug treatments that can help you to remain healthy and reduce the risk of HIV being passed on to your baby. However, we don't know the long-term effects of these treatments on unborn children.

You will have choices to make. The more information you have the better able you will be to make the best decision for you and your baby.

*How is the HIV test done?*

A small amount of blood is taken from your arm and sent to a lab to be tested. It takes about two weeks to get the test results. The test is very accurate, but to be sure you may choose to repeat the test in three months.

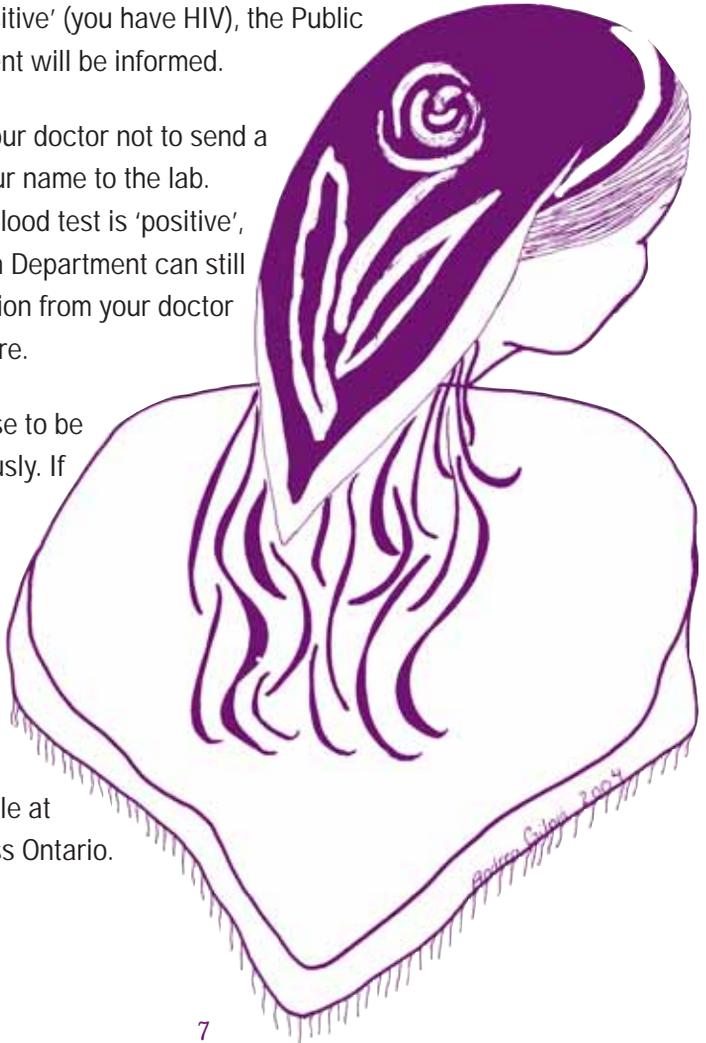
## *HIV Testing*

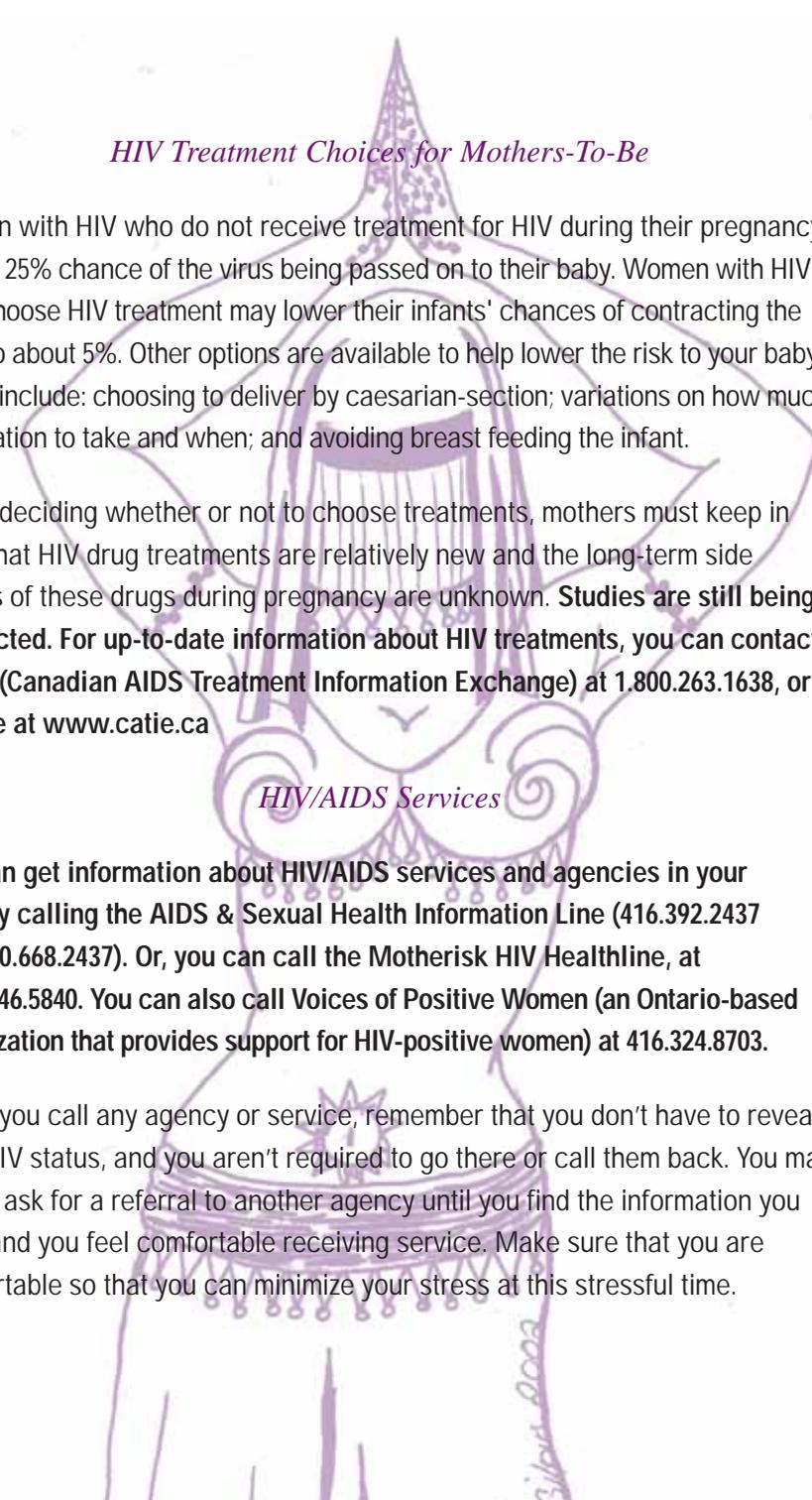
In Ontario, you will be offered the HIV test at your doctor's office when you find out that you are pregnant. You may choose to be tested or not to be tested. If you do choose to be tested, you have three choices of how and where to get tested:

**1.** At your doctor's office (or clinic), your name along with your blood sample will be sent to a lab where the blood is tested. If your blood test is 'positive' (you have HIV), the Public Health Department will be informed.

**2.** You can ask your doctor not to send a code and not your name to the lab. However, if the blood test is 'positive', the Public Health Department can still request information from your doctor about who you are.

**3.** You may choose to be tested anonymously. If you choose anonymous HIV testing no one will be able to trace the results of your test to you. Anonymous testing is available at many sites across Ontario.





## *HIV Treatment Choices for Mothers-To-Be*

Women with HIV who do not receive treatment for HIV during their pregnancy have a 25% chance of the virus being passed on to their baby. Women with HIV who choose HIV treatment may lower their infants' chances of contracting the virus to about 5%. Other options are available to help lower the risk to your baby. These include: choosing to deliver by caesarian-section; variations on how much medication to take and when; and avoiding breast feeding the infant.

When deciding whether or not to choose treatments, mothers must keep in mind that HIV drug treatments are relatively new and the long-term side effects of these drugs during pregnancy are unknown. **Studies are still being conducted. For up-to-date information about HIV treatments, you can contact CATIE (Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange) at 1.800.263.1638, or on-line at [www.catie.ca](http://www.catie.ca)**

### *HIV/AIDS Services*

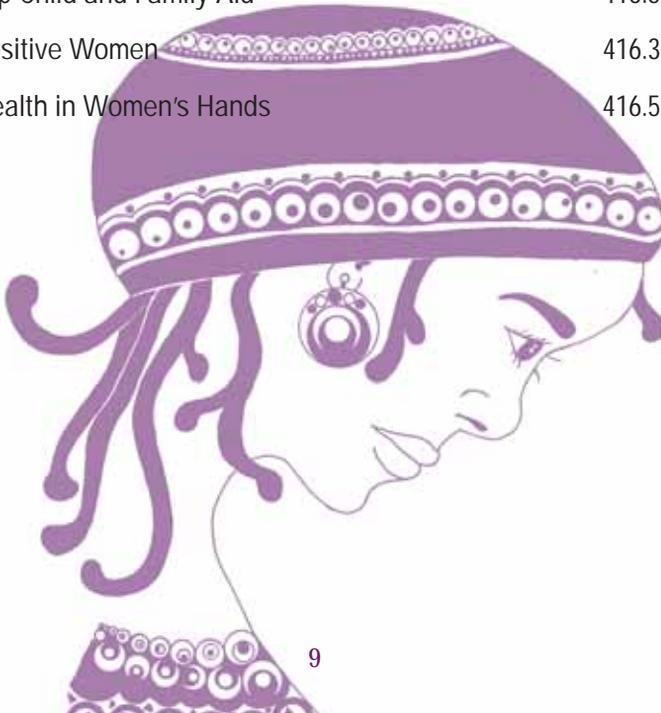
**You can get information about HIV/AIDS services and agencies in your area by calling the AIDS & Sexual Health Information Line (416.392.2437 or 1.800.668.2437). Or, you can call the Motherisk HIV Healthline, at 1.888.246.5840. You can also call Voices of Positive Women (an Ontario-based organization that provides support for HIV-positive women) at 416.324.8703.**

When you call any agency or service, remember that you don't have to reveal your HIV status, and you aren't required to go there or call them back. You may simply ask for a referral to another agency until you find the information you need and you feel comfortable receiving service. Make sure that you are comfortable so that you can minimize your stress at this stressful time.

## *Culturally Specific HIV/AIDS Services*

You may be able to get the information and support you need from someone who speaks your language or understands your culture. When you call a particular agency, ask to make sure they have someone who speaks your language. Some Community Health Centres also have service providers who speak a variety of languages.

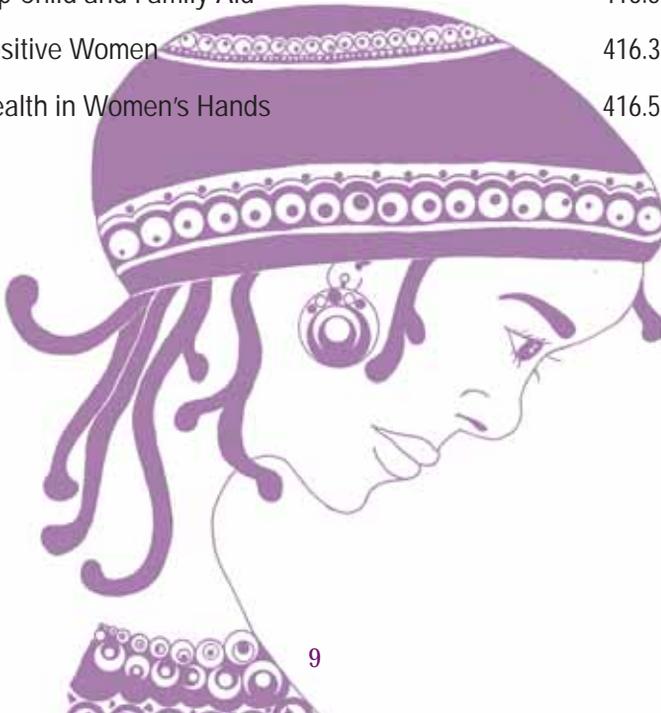
Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention	416.599.2727
African Community Health Services	416.591.7600
Africans in Partnership against AIDS	416.924.5256
Asian Community AIDS Services	416.963.4300
Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (Black CAP)	416.977.9955
Centre for Spanish-speaking People's AIDS Program	416.925.2800
Centre medico-social communautaire	416.922.2672
Portuguese-speaking Services, AIDS Committee of Toronto	416.340.8484 ext. 290
St. Stephen's Community House	416.926.8221
Teresa Group Child and Family Aid	416.596.7703
Voices of Positive Women	416.324.8703
Women's Health in Women's Hands	416.593.7655



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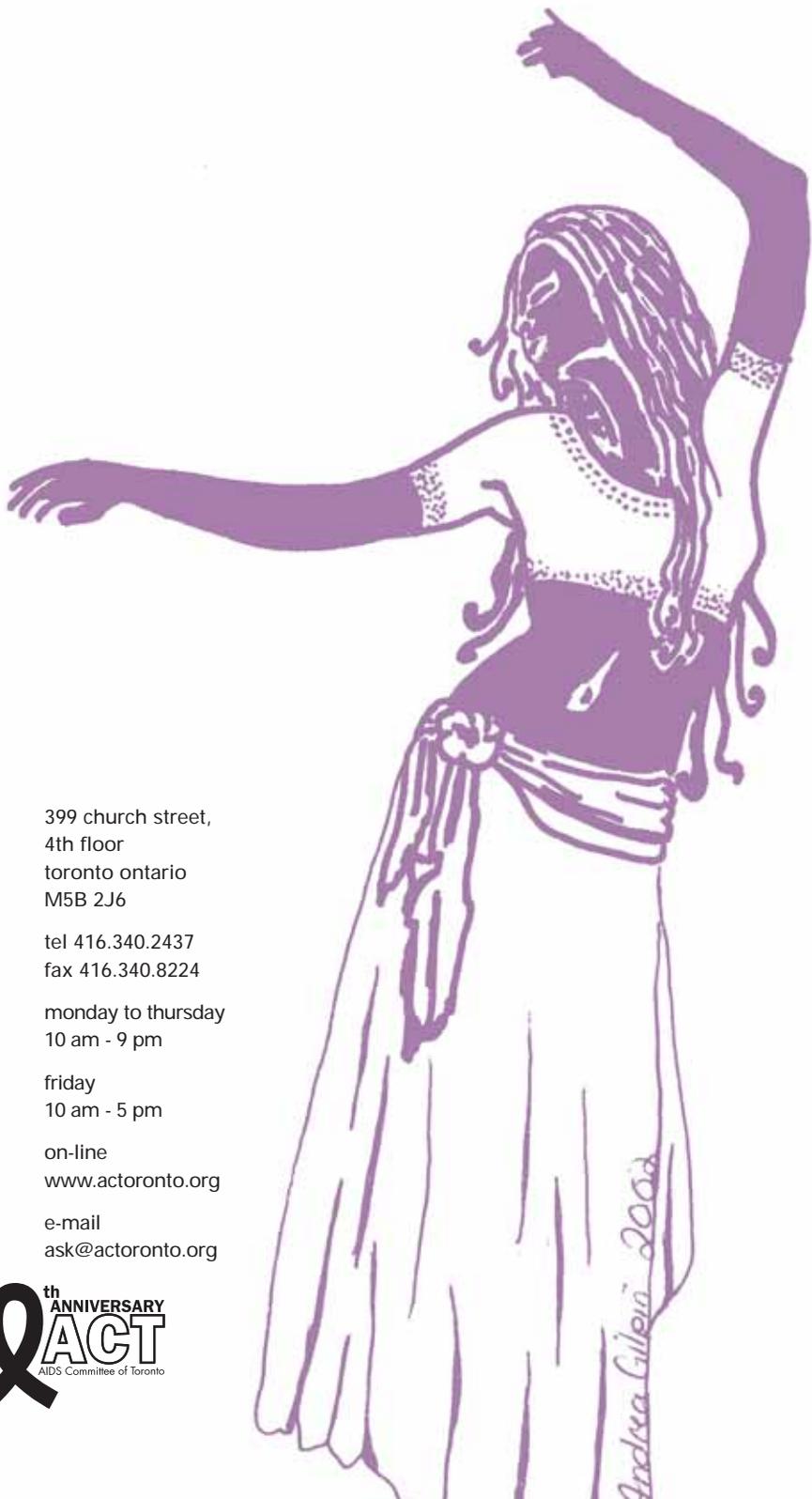
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This brochure was produced by the AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT) in collaboration with Voices of Positive Women, the Parkdale Primary Prevention Project, and the Brazil Angola Community Information Centre.





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**20<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY**  
**ACT**  
AIDS Committee of Toronto

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