

# basic facts about hiv & aids

## what is hiv and aids?

**HIV** stands for  
Human  
Immunodeficiency  
Virus

**AIDS** stands for  
Acquired  
ImmunoDeficiency  
Syndrome

HIV is a virus that attacks your immune system. Once the virus gets inside your body:

- You may not feel or look sick for years, but you can still infect others.
- Over time, your immune system may grow weak and you can become sick with different illnesses.
- If left untreated, your immune system will no longer be able to defend your body from infections, diseases or cancers which can kill you. This is called AIDS.

You can be **infected** with HIV no matter your:

- sex
- age
- sexual orientation
- ethnic origin

Everyone is **affected** by AIDS.

## is there a cure for hiv infection?

- No.
- There are some drugs that can slow down the disease so that you stay healthier for a longer time.
- Drugs cannot get rid of HIV or cure AIDS.

**Protect yourself from HIV.  
It's your only defence.**

## you can get hiv if . . .

- the virus gets into your bloodstream from another person who is infected with HIV. It can enter your body through the infected person's semen, vaginal fluid, or blood.

The virus can get into your bloodstream if:

- you have vaginal or anal sex with someone who has HIV without using a condom,
- you have oral sex with someone who has HIV without using a condom or a dental dam. A dental dam is a piece of latex used to cover the anus or vagina,
- you share needles to inject drugs like cocaine or steroids with someone who is infected with HIV,
- you share sex toys with someone who has HIV,
- you share a razor, or toothbrush with someone who has HIV, or
- you share anything that could carry HIV into your body.

You can get HIV if you use a needle infected with HIV to:

- get a tattoo,
- get your skin pierced, or
- have acupuncture.

A mother with HIV can pass it to her baby:

- when she is pregnant,
- at birth, or
- when she breastfeeds.

You may have HIV if you got blood or blood products with HIV in them before November 1985. Since then, all blood and blood products in Canada have been checked for HIV.

## you can't get hiv from . . .

- casual everyday contact such as talking or eating with someone who is infected with HIV,
- handshakes, hugs or kisses,
- coughs or sneezes,
- making a blood donation,
- swimming pools,
- toilet seats or water fountains,
- bed sheets,
- forks, spoons, cups, food, or
- insects or animals.

For other documents on HIV/AIDS, contact the  
Canadian HIV/AIDS Clearinghouse  
400-1565 Carling Avenue  
Ottawa, ON K1Z 8R1  
☎ 1-877-999-7740  
☎ 1-613-725-1205  
✉ [aidsida@cpha.ca](mailto:aidsida@cpha.ca)  
[www.clearinghouse.cpha.ca](http://www.clearinghouse.cpha.ca)

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## how do you find out if you have hiv . . .

If you think that you have been infected with HIV and you:

- feel tired
- have a fever
- have a sore throat
- have swollen lymph nodes in your neck
- have headaches
- have diarrhea or watery stools
- lose weight or
- get skin rashes

you should think about getting tested.

If you have HIV, your body will make antibodies to fight it. These antibodies will show up in a blood test. It can take up to six months after you get infected before the antibodies show up in a blood test.

## how you can protect yourself if you have sex . . .

You can still have sex with little or no risk of getting HIV. This is called “safer sex”. Having safer sex means making sure that semen, vaginal fluids, or blood do not get into your body.

To practice safer sex, use:

- a latex or polyurethane condom or female condom correctly, each time you have vaginal or anal sex;
- a condom or dental dam each time you have oral sex. A dental dam is a piece of latex used to cover the vagina or anus;
- only water-based lubricants with latex condoms. Don't use oil-based ones like Vaseline because they may weaken a latex condom and make it break.

## how can you protect yourself if you inject drugs . . .

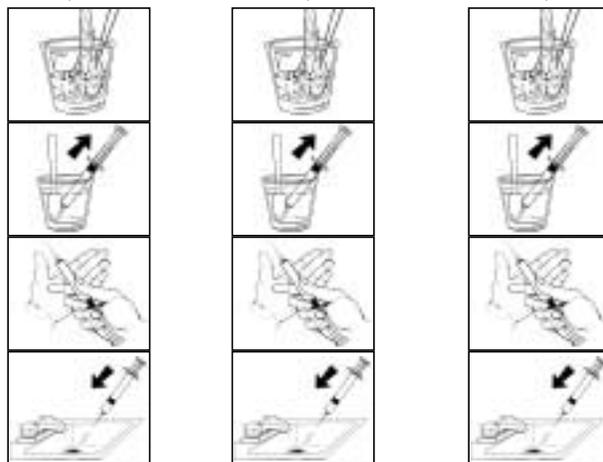
If you inject drugs like cocaine, heroin, or steroids, you can still reduce or eliminate the risk of getting HIV by practicing “safer needle use”.

### To practice “safer needle use” . . .

- use a new needle and new supplies each time you inject drugs,
- get a new needle from a needle exchange program, or
- clean a used needle carefully before using it again.

### To clean a used needle . . .

- fill it with clean water, shake it for 30 seconds, then empty it (repeat);
- fill it with bleach, shake it for 30 seconds then empty it (repeat);
- fill it with clean water again, shake it for 30 seconds, then empty it (repeat).



## for more information...

For more information on how to prevent HIV, get tested for HIV, or get treated for HIV, you can call:

- a public health unit,
- a CLSC,
- your local health centre,
- a family planning clinic,
- a testing clinic where your name will be kept secret,
- your local AIDS group,
- an AIDS hotline, or
- your doctor or nurse, or community health worker.