

# basic facts about HIV and safer injection drug use

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)

Published by the Canadian HIV/AIDS  
Clearinghouse, a program of the  
Canadian Public Health Association.



Funding for this publication  
was provided by Health Canada.

## injection drug use . . .

Quitting drugs is not possible for everyone. If you learn how to reduce the danger connected with injecting drugs, you can protect yourself and avoid health problems such as HIV and 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?

- 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 share needles to inject drugs like cocaine or steroids with someone who is infected with HIV,
- 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 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:

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

## 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. It is possible that you have HIV even if you do not have any of these symptoms.

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.

## needle exchange programs...

Needle exchange programs (NEPs) exist in many cities. You can get new syringes at a NEP by turning in your used ones. Visit your local needle exchange program for new supplies, more information and support. Make sure you get your new supplies before you score so that you're ready to go once you get your drugs.

## reducing the risk...

You can protect yourself and lower your risk by following some easy steps:

- Use a new fit **every time** you shoot up. You can get new needles from needle exchange programs in your area.
- Don't share, lend or borrow works.
- Don't handle or hold other people's works and don't let them touch yours.
- Clean your needles, syringes (rigs) and spoon/cooker properly if you have to use them more than once.

## how to clean your works...

If you can't get a new fit, here is how to clean your equipment (you must do all 3 steps):

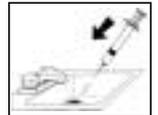
### 1. Rinse out the blood (you may not be able to see the blood)

Soak spoon (cooker) in water and shake it	Fill up syringe (rig)	Tap or shake syringe for 30 seconds	Empty syringe <b>Repeat</b> with new water
---	-----------------------	-------------------------------------	--



### 2. Disinfect with pure bleach

Soak spoon (cooker) in bleach and shake it	Fill up syringe (rig)	Tap or shake syringe for 30 seconds	Empty syringe <b>Repeat</b> with new bleach
--	-----------------------	-------------------------------------	---



### 3. Rinse with fresh water

Soak spoon (cooker) in water and shake it	Fill up syringe (rig)	Tap or shake syringe for 30 seconds	Empty syringe <b>Repeat</b> with new water
---	-----------------------	-------------------------------------	--



## for more information...

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

- a public health unit or 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.