A vibrant, stylized illustration of a diverse group of people of various ages and ethnicities. The background is filled with faces of men, women, and children, rendered in a bold, graphic style with thick outlines and a rich color palette. The central focus is a dark blue rectangular box containing the text "HIV is still around" in a bright yellow, sans-serif font. The word "HIV" is in a larger, bolder font than "is", and "still" is significantly larger than "around".

HIV is
still
around

Every day in Québec, three people are infected

Produced by:

**Direction des communications,
ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux**

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Every day in Québec, about three people are infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). HIV is now more familiar to us since it is affecting people around us more and more often.

Fortunately, the consequences of HIV are not as tragic as they were in the early years of the epidemic, when the number of deaths was very high. Today, people with HIV can live better and longer lives thanks to treatments. Although HIV treatments are restrictive and have many side effects, they can also delay the onset of AIDS, or acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

There is still a lot of prejudice associated with HIV. People with the infection often face discrimination that can have devastating psychological and social consequences for them, and for their friends and families. Consequently, many people living with HIV do not want to make their HIV status publicly known.

People are still dying of AIDS in Québec and the epidemic continues to grow. Therefore it is important to take stock of the disease, especially since it is possible to avoid getting the infection. In this manner, we can help limit the spread of the virus and overcome prejudices surrounding the disease.



Why is there so much concern about HIV?

- Because HIV destroys the body's defence system, leaving it unable to fight off diseases and infections.
- Because it contributes to the development of other diseases that can lead to death over time.
- Because currently, there is no cure for AIDS.

HIV does not discriminate on the basis of a person's sexual orientation, skin colour or age. Moreover, it is estimated that among people who have contracted HIV, one out of three does not know he or she has the infection. Therefore, men and women of all ethnic origins and sexual orientations should adopt protective behaviours to prevent the transmission of HIV.

Since there is no cure for AIDS, **PREVENTION** is the only effective way to combat HIV.

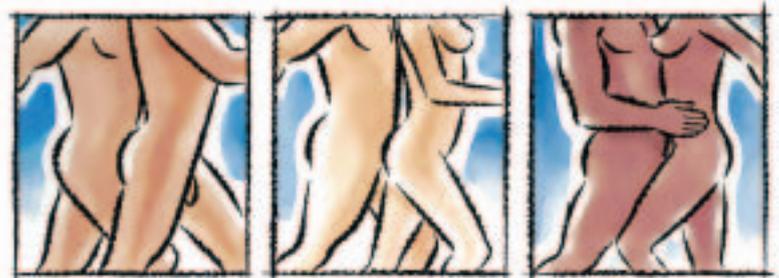


How does HIV spread?

HIV spreads through sexual relations, through blood and from a mother to her baby.

1

SEXUAL TRANSMISSION



HIV is mainly spread by not using a condom when having anal or vaginal sexual relations with someone who has HIV.

Anal or vaginal penetration facilitates entrance of sperm, vaginal secretions or menstrual blood into the partner's body; HIV can get into the bloodstream through small cuts or tears and settle in the body. Since they cause small cuts and tears, other sexually transmitted infections (STI) a sex partner may have can foster HIV transmission.

TRANSMISSION THROUGH BLOOD



HIV transmission through blood often occurs when people share used injection equipment to take drugs (cocaine, heroin, steroids, etc.). When people shoot up, they risk injecting HIV as well as hepatitis B and C viruses directly into their blood.

If needles and equipment used for tattooing and piercing are not new or sterilised, they can also transmit HIV and hepatitis B and C.

Since 1985, the risk of getting HIV infection through a blood transfusion has been extremely low. Héma-Québec makes sure that all blood donations are screened, and gets rid of contaminated blood. There is **NO RISK** of getting the infection when you **GIVE BLOOD** since a new needle is used for every person.

MOTHER-TO-CHILD TRANSMISSION

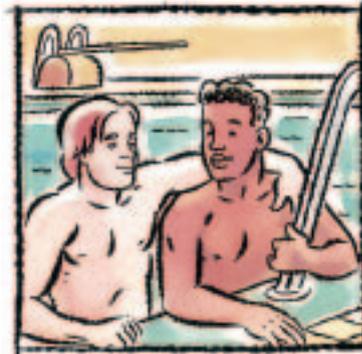


A mother who has HIV can pass it on to her child during pregnancy, delivery and even through breastfeeding, although this is rare.



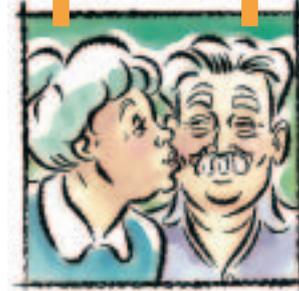
**EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES THAT
DO NOT SPREAD HIV**

Unlike influenza or chickenpox, HIV does not survive in the air, nor does it survive in water. Daily activities pose **NO RISK OF TRANSMISSION**



Examples of activities that do not spread

HIV



However, you should avoid coming into direct contact with blood, especially if there are open wounds on the skin. If contact occurs, the part of the body that has come into contact with the blood should quickly be washed with soap and water.

How

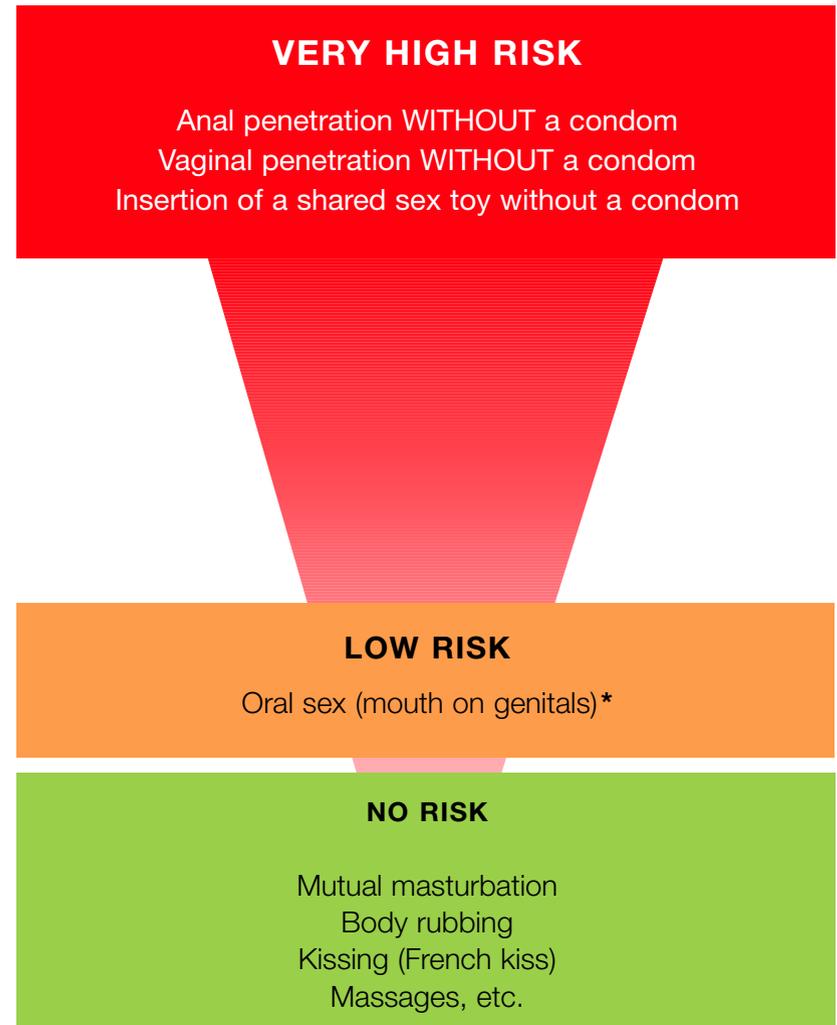
can HIV spread during
sexual relations be prevented



If you have sexual relations, the best way to reduce the risk of getting HIV and other STI is to adopt safe practices.

The diagramme on page 11 groups together sexual practices by level of risk of HIV transmission when the partner has HIV. It should be noted that the risk of transmission increases with the number of partners and when a woman is menstruating.

**LEVELS OF RISK OF HIV TRANSMISSION
DURING SEXUAL ACTIVITIES**



* However, having oral sex without condoms is a very high risk activity for other STI





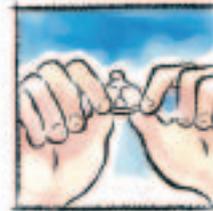
Therefore, if people have sexual relations with penetration, the best way to protect themselves against HIV and other STI is to use condoms. Birth-control pills and intrauterine devices (IUD) offer NO PROTECTION WHATSOEVER against HIV and other STI.

If you decide to use a condom, you will certainly feel more at ease when you have sex. Make sure it is clear from the very beginning of your relationship that you plan to use condoms, especially before you start having sexual relations. To feel more comfortable when having sex, men who have never used condoms can practice using them on their own. The Web site www.jcapote.com (in French) has much information about condoms and how to discuss their use with a partner.



Here is a bit of advice to help you use male condoms properly:

- buy lubricated latex condoms;
- check the expiration date;
- be careful when you open the package; use your fingers and not your teeth (you can even do this before you start having sex);
- either partner can put the condom on the penis before there is any genital or anal contact;
- before putting the condom on the penis, unroll the edge a bit to make sure it is unrolling on the right side;
- before unrolling the condom on the penis, pinch the tip of the condom to let the air out; this leaves room for the sperm and prevents the condom from breaking;
- add a few drops of water-based lubricant (K-Y™, H-R™, Wet™, ID™, etc.) inside and outside the condom to help the penis slide more easily and to increase sensitivity.





Do not use oil-based lubricants like Vaseline™, baby oils, or massage and bath oils. They can weaken the latex and cause the condom to break;



- to prevent leakage, the man should withdraw the penis soon after ejaculation, while it is still erect, and hold the condom by the ring to make sure it does not fall off;



- make a knot in the condom to stop sperm from spilling out, and throw it in the garbage.

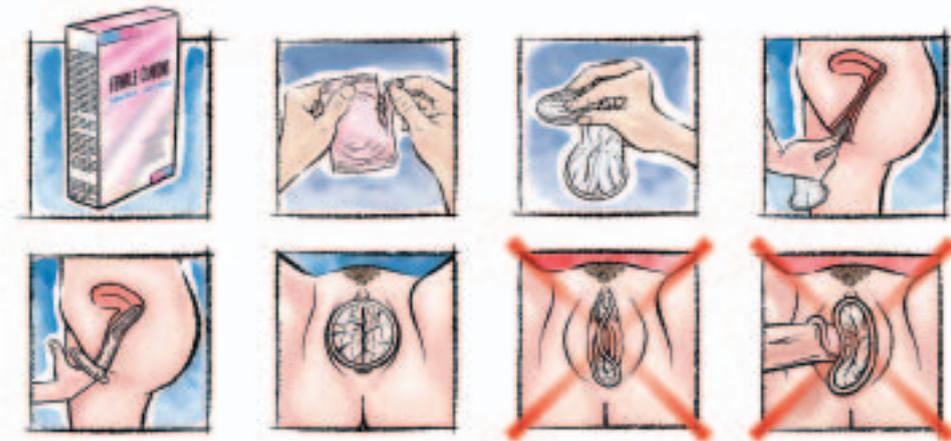
After a few tries, you'll see that condoms can be an integral part of sex play and are very reassuring. Using condoms will soon become a habit. And you might find that a condom can make the pleasure last longer.

Do not use spermicide

There are several products on the market that contain nonoxynol, a spermicide used mostly to prevent pregnancy. It is found in lubricating jellies, vaginal foams and in some lubricated condoms. Condoms lubricated with nonoxynol do not protect against STI and HIV as well as those only coated with a water-based lubricant. Nonoxynol is not recommended for the prevention of HIV transmission since it can cause irritations that can spread the virus more easily.

The female condom

One of the benefits of the female condom is that women can take the initiative to protect themselves and their partners against HIV. It is a polyurethane sheath or pouch that lines the vagina. At each end of the condom, there are two flexible plastic rings. The closed end is inserted into the vagina and the open end stays outside the vulva, at the entrance of the vagina. The condom is lubricated with a water-based lubricant, which makes it easier to insert and allows comfortable movement during sex. It can be inserted into the vagina up to eight hours before intercourse.



Sex toys should be used with condoms or disinfected with bleach.

How

can HIV transmission

through blood be prevented



If you inject drugs, always use new equipment and never share it. Injection equipment should only be used once.

New needles and injection equipment are available from community groups, pharmacies, and Health and Social Services Centres (CLSCs and hospital centres)* where this sign is posted:



To protect other people, avoid giving blood if you have HIV, or if you engage or have engaged in risky behaviours.

* For a list of centres that offer access to needles in Québec, visit www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/ftss and go to the section documentation / professionnels de la santé.



How

can mother-to-child HIV

transmission be prevented



The risk of HIV transmission from a mother to her child can be almost totally eliminated by using medications, having a caesarean delivery, and avoiding breastfeeding.

What should you do

if you have engaged
in risky behaviours 

An HIV-antibody test could be indicated if you are in one of the following situations:

- You or your partner have had unprotected sexual relations with:
 - someone living with HIV,
 - someone who has an STI or who has had one in the past,
 - someone who has had multiple partners,
 - someone whose sexual past you do not know well or at all;
- You or your partner have shared needles or other equipment to inject drugs or steroids;
- You have had a needlestick injury;
- You or your partner have gotten a tattoo or piercing done with used needles and equipment;
- You are in a serious relationship and would like to stop using condoms;

- You are pregnant or wish to get pregnant (the HIV screening test is included in the prenatal evaluation offered to pregnant women by doctors).



PEOPLE WHO HAVE NOT ENGAGED IN RISKY BEHAVIOURS OR WHO HAVE NOT BEEN IN SITUATIONS WHERE THEY COULD HAVE BEEN INFECTED WITH THE VIRUS DO NOT HAVE TO HAVE THIS TEST. A PERSON WHO IS APPLYING FOR A JOB CANNOT BE FORCED TO HAVE A TEST.

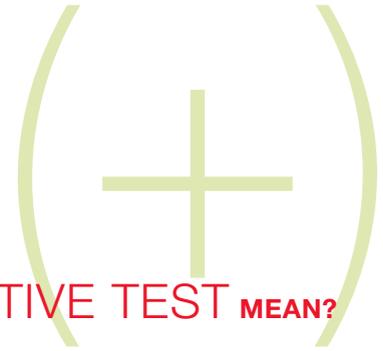


If you are afraid you have been exposed to HIV, quickly consult a doctor or a nurse. He or she will help you decide if you need to have an HIV blood test and start preventive treatment. This could also be a good opportunity to be tested for other sexually transmitted and bloodborne infections. You can also contact your Health and Social Services Centre (CLSCs), where you can get confidential counselling.



If you want to stay anonymous, a code can be used instead of your name. Call your Info-Santé line or your Health and Social Services Centre (CLSC) for the address.

IT IS NOT RECOMMENDED TO GIVE BLOOD AT A HÉMA-QUÉBEC BLOOD CLINIC TO FIND OUT IF YOU ARE INFECTED.



WHAT DOES A POSITIVE TEST MEAN?

If you have tested positive, it means that HIV has made its way into your body and that it will enter into the cells that defend your body (immune system). However, it is not known how long it can take before the virus starts causing symptoms or AIDS. A consultation with a doctor will help you evaluate together whether or not to start treatment. Moreover, since HIV lodges itself in your body, you can spread it to other people.

Therefore, it is essential that you use condoms when you have sex and that you not share your drug injection equipment. You can also choose sexual activities that do not involve penetration, such as petting, massages and mutual masturbation. Having HIV does not prevent anyone from loving someone or experiencing his or her sexuality!





WHAT DOES A NEGATIVE TEST MEAN?

If your test is negative, it can mean:

- that you are not infected;
- that your body has not developed enough antibodies (substances that have reacted to the HIV virus) against the virus to be detected by the test because the infection is too recent. This situation can arise when exposure to the virus occurred less than three to six months before having the test. Therefore it may be necessary to get tested again.

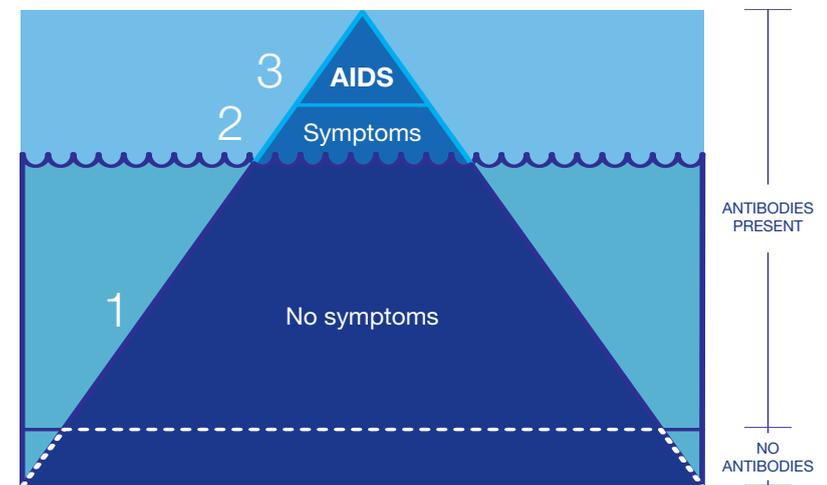
A negative test does not mean that you cannot get infected later. For this reason, it is important to always use condoms and new injection equipment. If both partners have been tested and results are negative, they can stop using condoms as long as both people are sure that their partner has been faithful during the six months preceding the test and... after.



What are the stages of HIV INFECTION ?

To better understand the evolution of HIV infection, we can use the image of an iceberg.

The iceberg represents all people living with HIV. The part under water corresponds to the people who have no symptoms, whereas the part above represents people who have symptoms.



1

The first stage, which lasts several years, corresponds to the part of the iceberg that is underwater, that is, the period during which people have no symptoms. However, even if they have no symptoms, they can still spread the virus.

At the beginning of this stage, some people can have symptoms similar to those of a bad flu. These symptoms disappear after a few weeks. During the early stage of the infection, they can test negative because they have not had the time to develop antibodies.

People who are infected usually become seropositive less than three months after the onset of the infection, and will remain so for the rest of their lives. Their state of health usually remains stable, they live normal lives and can work. Even so, they should be followed by a doctor. Most people with HIV are at this stage.

Stage 2 corresponds to the time when HIV weakens the body. The infection can then progress and increasingly serious symptoms can appear, including:

- marked swelling of the lymph nodes, especially in the neck, armpits or groin;
- persistent diarrhoea;
- unexplained and prolonged fatigue;
- significant weight loss unrelated to dieting;
- night sweats;
- persistent fever;
- mouth infections (e.g. thrush);
- persistent cough;
- recurring gynaecological problems (e.g.: menstrual irregularities, abnormal vaginal discharge, vaginal yeast infections).

These symptoms, which can also be linked to other diseases, can come and go. Good lifestyle habits such as having a healthy diet, getting enough sleep, not smoking, consuming alcohol or drugs in moderation, and following prescribed treatments can delay the onset of symptoms and of AIDS. Of course, HIV can be transmitted during this period.

The tip of the iceberg, the most visible and smallest part, corresponds to **stage 3** of HIV infection. This is the time when people living with HIV develop AIDS. The immune system grows weak and opens the door to all kinds of diseases (pneumonias, cancers, tuberculosis, etc.) that can result in blindness and neurological problems, for example, and finally death.



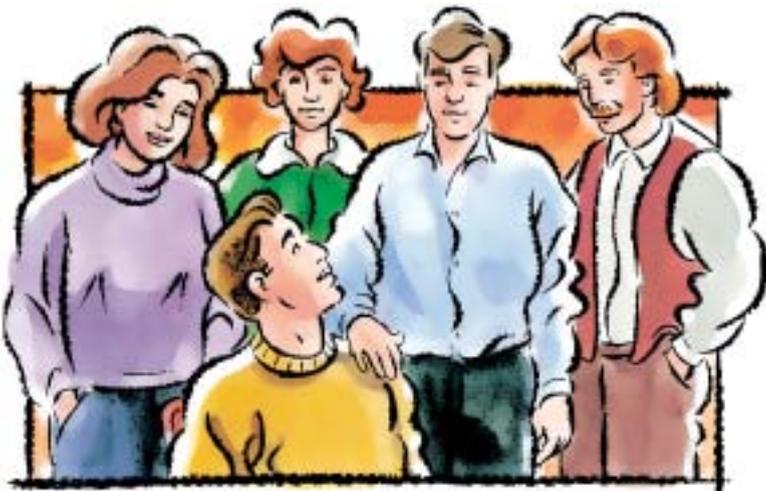
Are there any treatments for HIV and AIDS ?

Currently, there is NO VACCINE or treatment that can cure AIDS. **PREVENTION IS STILL THE ONLY WAY TO FIGHT THE SPREAD OF HIV.** However, several recognised medications can halt the progression of HIV in the body, and help delay or prevent the appearance of AIDS. The best way to combat the virus is to stop it from multiplying. Other medications are also used to treat or prevent the infections caused by AIDS. These treatments improve quality of life even though they can be quite restrictive and have a number of side effects.

Rapid progress in the field of medical research gives us hope that one day, there will be a vaccine against this disease or a treatment to cure it.

For now, however, daily life is often difficult for people with HIV and AIDS. Although this diagnosis can change their lifestyles, the meaning of their lives and their priorities, one thing is clear: they need the support, affection and kindness of family, friends and colleagues more than ever.

These people not only need compassion from the general population but should also have their rights protected in practical everyday situations. The Québec Charter of Humans Rights and Freedoms prohibits discrimination in all areas (employment, access to goods and services, etc.) against someone who is, or is perceived to be, seropositive. In concrete terms, this means, for example, that a person cannot be fired or demoted because he or she has HIV. Also, one cannot refuse to rent an apartment, sell goods, provide care or services, or serve an individual in a restaurant or store because he or she has HIV.





For more information about HIV, talk to a doctor or call the Info-Santé line.

To get the address of the local HIV/AIDS organisation nearest you, contact the:

Coalition des organismes communautaires québécois de lutte contre le sida (COCQ-sida) at (514) 844-2477, or at **www.cocqsida.com**.

Service de lutte contre les infections transmissibles sexuellement et par le sang
www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/itss