

*Caring safely
for people with
HIV or AIDS*



What you need to know about HIV and AIDS

Giving safe care to people with HIV or AIDS in the community is largely common sense. Everyday good hygiene and practising universal precautions (often called routine practices) will usually be enough.

This booklet gives simple instructions about concerns that caregivers may have.

This booklet will help caregivers and HIV-positive people understand how you can or can't get HIV, and how to keep both the caregiver and the person in care from getting sick.

How is HIV transmitted?

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

The virus can get into your bloodstream if:

- you have unprotected vaginal or anal sex with someone who has HIV,
- 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, or
- you share a razor or toothbrush with someone who has HIV.

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.

Before November 1985, it was also possible to get HIV if you received a blood transfusion or blood products infected with HIV. Since then, all blood and blood products in Canada have been screened for HIV.

Take care of yourself

Staying healthy is one of the best ways to make sure you and the person you care for are both safe.

If you are sick, or just not feeling well, try to stay away from the person you are caring for. Germs from a cold or flu can harm someone with HIV or AIDS, so wear a mask if you have a cold or flu.

Rest, exercise and healthy eating are important for your well-being.

If you live with the person you care for, try to take time for yourself. A short break will help reduce stress and burn-out. If you can't leave him/her alone, find someone to fill in at home while you're out. Many community-based organizations offer respite care programs that provide support to caregivers.

Universal Precautions...

Universal precautions (often called routine practices) are guidelines designed to protect people from exposure to diseases that are spread by blood and other body fluids. These guidelines are meant to keep people safe from infection and discrimination by suggesting that we assume that everyone is infected with a blood-borne disease such as HIV or hepatitis.

Keep it clean...

Good cleaning practices will help destroy germs that may be dangerous to both you and the person you are caring for. It is important that personal items, such as towels or toothbrushes, not be shared. Remember that the person who has a weakened immune system is much more susceptible to germs and bacteria than you may be.



Copies of this Universal Precautions poster are available from the CATIE Ordering Centre. See page 10 for contact information.

In the kitchen

It is important to clean your kitchen counters with a clean cloth and household cleaners and to rinse them with fresh water. Wash your dishes, pots, cutting boards, glasses and cutlery in hot, soapy water. Mop the floor at least once a week and throw the dirty water down the toilet. Wash your hands with soap and warm water after handling garbage.

Take care... to keep food safe

Germs that live on or in food can make you and the person you care for sick. It's important to prepare food carefully.

- Wash your hands with soap and warm water before preparing food.
- Wash fruits and vegetables before you cook or eat them.
- Cook or peel organic fruits and vegetables because they may have germs on the skins.
- Use one utensil for stirring and a separate one if you taste the food during preparation.
- Don't give a person with HIV or AIDS uncooked meat, uncooked fish, or raw eggs.
- Don't give a person with HIV or AIDS unpasteurized milk.
- Serve hot foods while they are still hot, and cold foods while they are still cold.
- Cover and refrigerate leftovers immediately.



In the bathroom and laundry

Cleaning kills germs that may be dangerous to you and the person you are caring for.

Take care... in the bathroom

- Clean tubs, showers and sinks with a clean cloth and household cleaners and rinse with fresh water.
- Mop the floor at least once a week. Throw the dirty water down the toilet.
- Wear rubber gloves when you clean the toilet. Use bleach to kill germs.
- Everyone should use their own towels, washcloths, razors and toothbrushes.



Take care... in the laundry

If you live with the person you are caring for, you can combine your clothes in the laundry. Use warm water and laundry soap.

Take care... around body fluids

Vomit, diarrhea, and other body fluids that contain blood should be cleaned up right away. Clean floors and other surfaces with 1 part bleach mixed in 9 parts water, and wear rubber gloves.

If there are body fluids on clothes, towels or bedding, washing them with ordinary soap and water will kill HIV on these materials. You can also soak the soiled items in cold water and bleach to remove any stains.

Wet garbage such as disposable diapers, bandages and menstrual pads should be put in two plastic bags to prevent leaks.

Personal care

Shaking hands, hugging or giving a massage is always safe. Compassionate care includes a lot of contact.

A healthy skin is a good barrier against infection. At the same time, skin can carry germs that can hurt you and the person you are caring for.

Wash your hands with soap and warm water before/after you:

- sneeze or cough
- go to the toilet
- touch your nose, mouth or genitals
- handle garbage
- clean the house
- handle blood, semen, urine, vaginal fluid or feces
- handle food, especially meat and fish
- provide personal care (such as bathing)
- change diapers, menstrual pads or bandages
- wear latex/rubber gloves

How to wash your hands...

Wash your hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. Remember to clean under your fingernails and between your fingers.



When you need to wear gloves...

You should wear disposable, latex gloves when you:

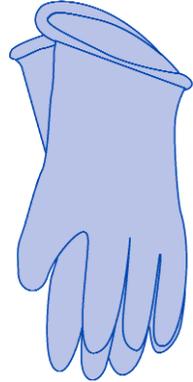
- come into contact with blood, other body fluids or open cuts
- have cuts, sores or rashes on your hands

You should wear rubber gloves when you clean up:

- toilets and the rest of the bathroom
- after pets

Wash rubber work gloves well after use, and then wash your hands.

For people who are allergic to latex, vinyl gloves are available.



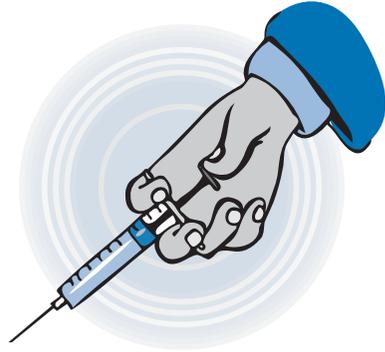
Take care with needles

When handling needles, always:

- hold the sharp end away from yourself
- put used needles in a sharps container or a glass or hard plastic jar with a lid (you should mark the container with a biohazard label)
- give the container to your health care professional for safe disposal

When handling needles, never:

- put the cap back on the needle
- bend or cut the needle
- remove the needle from the syringe
- put used needles or the used needle container in the garbage



What if ... I stick myself?

Don't panic.

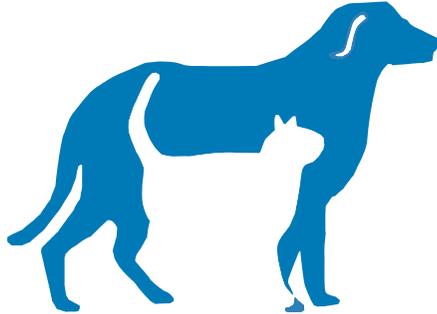
- Put the needle in the used needle container.
- Wash where you stuck yourself using soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds.
- Call your doctor, clinic nurse or emergency services and tell them what happened.
- Follow their instructions.

Pets and gardening

When you are caring for someone with HIV or AIDS, you may be caring for his/her pet as well.

Take care ... with bird cages, litter boxes and fish tanks

You should wear rubber gloves while cleaning bird cages, litter boxes or fish and animal tanks, and wash your hands after. People with HIV or AIDS should never clean tanks, cages or litter boxes.



Take care... when gardening

You and the person you are caring for should wear work gloves when gardening. Germs can live in gardens or potting soil. Wash your hands after gardening.

For more information, contact:

- local AIDS committee
- local public health unit or community clinic
- your doctor
- CATIE (Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange)

Permission is granted for non-commercial reproduction of this booklet for educational purposes, as long as credit is given.

Need more HIV and AIDS information and resources?

Contact CATIE (Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange) at 1-800-263-1638

E-mail: info@catie.ca

www.catie.ca

Published by the Canadian Public Health Association (2003).

Revised October 2005

This publication has been reprinted by CATIE, 2008.

Production of this document has been made possible through a financial contribution from the Public Health Agency of Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Order Catalogue No: AT1- 20672