

# HIV

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW



Canadian AIDS  
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## What is HIV?

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus, the virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). HIV attacks the cells of the immune system. After infection, HIV gradually weakens the immune system. Without a strong immune system, the body is unable to fight off infections.

## How do you get HIV?

HIV is passed from one person to another by the exchange of infected blood, semen, vaginal fluid or breast-milk. Getting someone's blood, semen or vaginal fluid in your vagina or rectum during sex, or injecting someone else's blood in your body (in your veins or under your skin) by sharing needles or syringes are the two most common ways you can become infected with HIV.

## How do I know if I have HIV?

Many people who have HIV do not know they have it. The only way to know is to have an HIV test. Since you may have HIV and not know it, it is important that you and your partner try to prevent blood, semen or vaginal fluid from getting inside each other's vagina or rectum during sex. If you are injecting any type of drugs, it is important not to share needles, syringes or drug preparation equipment. You can get someone else's blood in your body (in your veins or under your skin) if you share needles, syringes or drug preparation equipment.

## Is there a cure?

No. While a number of drugs are available to treat HIV disease, there is no cure. Anti-HIV drugs try to slow down the destruction of the immune system by preventing the virus from multiplying in the body. Anti-HIV drugs are not a cure because they do not completely get rid of HIV in the body. HIV still kills.

## What is a female condom?

A female condom can be put inside the vagina before intercourse to prevent any semen from getting inside. Female condoms are a good protection against HIV infection. The female condom can be purchased at many drug stores across Canada.

## Do other STIs (sexually transmitted infections) increase my risk for HIV?

Yes. Having other STIs (sexually transmitted infections) increases your risk of getting HIV. This is because STIs can lower your body's natural protection against HIV. It is a good idea to talk to a nurse or doctor about getting tested for other STIs. If you have other STIs, it is important to see a doctor and have them treated. Treating STIs may reduce your risk of getting HIV.

People engaging in any sexual activities where there is contact between the mouth and someone's penis, vagina or anus, have a high risk of getting other STIs. Using a latex condom, either on the penis or

cut lengthwise and spread against someone's vagina or anus, reduces the risk of getting other STIs. Protecting yourself from STIs makes sense.

## **How do I avoid getting HIV?**

There are a number of ways to avoid getting HIV and still have a good time. Wearing a latex condom on your penis or a female condom in your vagina when you have intercourse is your best protection against sexual transmission of HIV. If you use drugs, try to avoid injecting. Most drugs that are injected can also be smoked or snorted.

- 1. Fill the syringe with water ( soapy if possible), shake, and then squirt out.**
- 2. Fill the syringe with full-strength bleach, leave for at least 30 seconds, and then squirt out.**
- 3. Repeat step 2, using new bleach.**
- 4. Fill the syringe with fresh water, shake, and the squirt out.**
- 5. Repeat step 4, using fresh water.**
- 6. You should also clean and rinse mixing equipment each time.**

If you do inject, then use a new needle and syringe every time. If a new needle and syringe are not available, then cleaning the old ones offers some protection against HIV (but not Hepatitis C). Cleaning and rinsing does not protect you from Hepatitis C and does not guarantee you won't get HIV, but is better than doing nothing.

Tattooing and piercing should only be done using sterilized equipment.

Cleaning and rinsing does not protect you from Hepatitis C and does not guarantee you won't get HIV, but is better than doing nothing.

## **What are the risks?**

This chart gives you an idea of how risky various activities are for getting HIV. When people have sex or use drugs, they don't usually do just one thing. You need to think about all the things you do when you have sex or use drugs, and how risky they are.

## **I already have HIV. Can I still have sex?**

Yes. If you already have HIV, you can still have an active sex life. But it is important to protect yourself as well as your sex partners and drug-using partners from infection. Don't have intercourse without a condom and don't share needles, syringes or drug preparation equipment. If you already have HIV, then getting infected with other STIs, such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, herpes and syphilis, may further weaken your immune

## High Risk

1. Injection using shared, uncleaned needle and/or syringe and/or mixing equipment injection using shared, cleaned needle and/or mixing equipment. Piercing, electrolysis and acupuncture using unsterilized equipment. Rough sex, unprotected anal sex, sex during menstruation and some S

All of the practices listed in this category present a potential for HCV transmission because they involve an exchange of blood. In addition a si studies have repeatedly associated the activities with HCV infection. Even when the exact mechanism of transmission is not completely clear, studies conclude that activities in this category are high risk. The risk of sexual transmission increases if you have had multiple sex partners.

## Low Risk

2. Snorting or smoking cocaine or other drugs using shared straws and shared pipes. Sharing toothbrushes and razors. Accidental needle-st \*insertive or receptive penile-anal or penile-vaginal intercourse without a condom, receptive insertion of shared sex toys. Performing fellatio w performing cunnilingus (putting mouth and/or tongue inside vagina) without barrier.

All of the practices listed in this category present a potential for HCV transmission because they involve an exchange of blood. There are also to these activities (usually through individual case studies or anecdotal reports. and usually under certain identifiable conditions.)

**\*While evidence for HCV transmission in sexual activity shows the risk is low, the risk of transmission for other diseases including HIV remains high, thus individuals should remember to protect themselves from HIV and other STIs.**

## Negligible Risk

3. Breast-feeding when nipples are cracked ro bleeding. Insertive or receptive penile-anal or penile-vaginal intercourse with barrier. Performin fellatio/cunnilingus with barrier, anilingus (putting mouth and/or tongue around or inside some's anus). digital-anal intercourse fingering someone's anus).

The practices listed in this category present a potential for HCV transmission because they may involve and exchange of blood. However, the amounts, conditions and media of exchange are such that the efficiency of HCV transmission appears to be greatly diminished. There are no confirmed reports of infection from these activities.

## No Risk

4. Injection using a new needle and syringe and unshared mixing equipment. Tattooing, piercing, electrolysis and acupuncture using sterilized equipment. Snorting or smoking cocaine or other drugs using new straw and unshared pipes. Breast-feeding (when nipples are healthy). Kissing, solo masturbation, being masturbated by partner (without using the other person's semen/vaginal fluid as lubricant), using unshared sex toys, urination, ejaculation or defecation on unbroken skin, massage, touch, caressing, dirty-talk, body rubbing.

To our knowledge, none of the practices in this category has ever been demonstrated to lead to HCV infection. There is no potential for transmission since one of the basic conditions for viral transmission is present.

## No risk

4. Kissing, solo mas urination, ejaculation ( and syringe.

To our knowledge, no basic conditions for vi

# Model

pment. Tattooing, S&M activities.

significant number of ; the results of such

stick injury with a used needle. without barrier (sucking cock).

a few reports of infection attributed

ing

## High risk

1. Insertive or receptive penile-anal or penile-vaginal intercourse without condom, sharing needles or syringes to inject drugs, receptive insertion of shared sex toys.

All of the practices listed in this category present a potential for HIV transmission because they involve an exchange of body fluids such as semen, vaginal fluid, blood or breast-milk. In addition a significant number of studies have repeatedly associated the activities with HIV infection. Even when the exact mechanism of transmission is not completely clear, the results of such studies conclude that activities in this category are high risk.

## Low risk

2. Performing fellatio without barrier (sucking cock), performing cunnilingus (putting mouth and/or tongue inside vagina) without barrier, insertive or receptive penile-anal or penile-vaginal intercourse with barrier, \*injection of a substance using a needle and syringe which has been cleaned.

All of the practices listed in this category present a potential for HIV transmission because they involve an exchange of body fluids such as semen, vaginal fluid, blood or breast-milk. There are also a few reports of infection attributed to these activities (usually through individual case studies or anecdotal reports, and usually under certain identifiable conditions).

\* Cleaning does not prevent transmission of the Hepatitis C virus.

## Negligible risk

3. Performing fellatio/cunnilingus with barrier, anilingus (putting mouth and/or tongue around or inside someone's anus), digital-anal intercourse (fingering someone's anus).

All of the practices listed in this category present a potential for HIV transmission because they involve an exchange of body fluids such as semen, vaginal fluid, blood or breast-milk. However, the amounts, conditions and media of exchange are such that the efficiency of HIV transmission appears to be greatly diminished. There are no confirmed reports of infection from these activities.

sturbation, being masturbated by partner (without using the other person's semen/vaginal fluid as lubricant), using unshared sex toys, or defecation on unbroken skin, massage, touch, caressing, dirty-talk, body rubbing, injection of a substance using a new needle

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system. It is important to be tested regularly for STIs and to be treated for them promptly.

It is also possible to get another form of HIV that may be resistant to anti-HIV drugs. This can limit your treatment options.

Before having sex or engaging in a risky activity, it is a good idea to tell your sex partner that you have HIV. You can be prosecuted if you expose your partner to HIV.

## **Is oral sex safer than intercourse?**

Yes. However, if you have any open cuts, sores or burns in your mouth, or if you have bleeding gums, then you should also use a latex condom for oral sex, either on the penis or cut lengthwise and placed against the vulva (ensuring that the vagina is well covered) or anus. Also, wait 30 minutes after brushing or flossing your teeth before performing oral sex. While oral sex is safer than intercourse it is still a high risk for other STIs.

## What about HIV and pregnancy?

If you have HIV and are pregnant, there are things you can do to reduce the risk that your baby will get HIV. Taking an anti-HIV drug (such as AZT or nevirapine - prescribed by your doctor) after the end of the third month of pregnancy until the baby has been delivered, then treating the baby with an anti-HIV drug for one month after birth and not breastfeeding can dramatically reduce the risk of your baby getting HIV.

Anti-HIV drugs are not a cure, because they do not completely get rid of HIV in the body. AIDS still kills.

## Other things to think about

- Using drugs or alcohol can affect your decision-making about sex.
- Some people find it difficult to get their partners to wear a condom.
- Using a female condom may make it easier for you to protect yourself and your

partner when you have intercourse.

- If you have HIV, taking a combination of different anti-HIV drugs may help keep you healthier for longer. However, you can still infect others with HIV.
- If you smoke crack cocaine regularly, you may have a higher risk of HIV infection from oral sex. This is because crack cocaine can cause burns inside the mouth and weaken the mouth's natural protection against HIV.
- Viral load is the amount of HIV in the blood. If you have HIV, even if your viral load is low or "undetectable", you can still infect others.
- Douching or enemas (flushing out the vagina or rectum) before or after intercourse can increase your risk of getting HIV. This is because douching and enemas weaken the natural protection on your vagina and rectum against HIV.
- Saliva (spit) has a substance in it that can

- prevent HIV from infecting cells in the body. There is no risk of getting HIV from kissing.
- If you can't get your partner to wear a condom, then putting a lot of lubricant in your vagina or in your anus is a good way to prevent small cuts or tears. It is not as efficient as a condom but it might help reduce the risk of HIV transmission.
  - Remember: wearing a latex condom on your penis or a female condom in your vagina is your best protection against sexual transmission of HIV.

## Who can you call for more information?

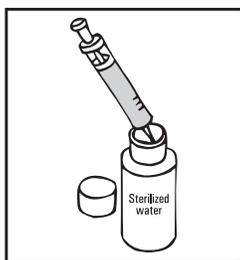
Refer to HIV/HCV Transmission: Guidelines for Assessing Risk (2004), available from the Canadian Public Health Association ([www.cpha.ca](http://www.cpha.ca)) and the Canadian HIV/AIDS Information Centre ([www.aidssida.cpha.ca](http://www.aidssida.cpha.ca)). Call toll-free 1(877) 999-7740 or email [aidssida@cpha.ca](mailto:aidssida@cpha.ca)

# Needle cleaning

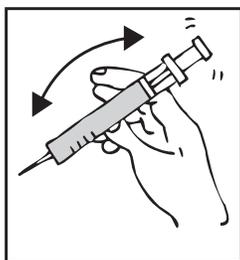
It is well established that sharing needles and syringes poses a high risk of transmission of HIV, HCV and other blood-borne viruses. To avoid the risk, a new and/or unshared needle and syringe should be used every time. Try not to share needles (“fits”). If you do share, always clean the needle and syringe with bleach and water. Here’s how.

## Water rinse x1

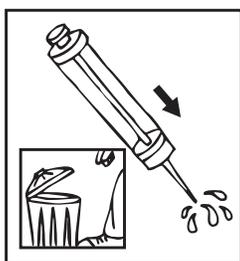
Fill the syringe completely with sterile water. (Soapy water if you can.) Shake. Squirt out. Do not reuse this water.



**FILL**



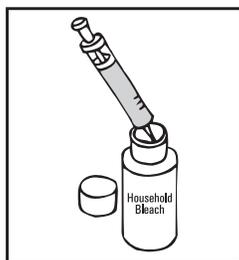
**SHAKE**



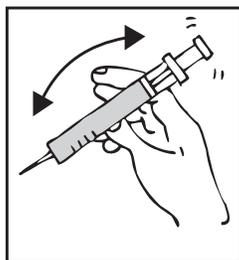
**EMPTY**  
**DISCARD WATER BOTTLE**

## Bleach x2

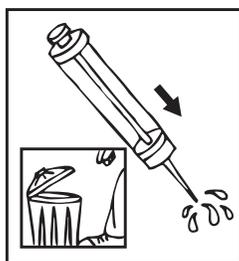
Fill the syringe completely with full strength bleach. Leave for at least 30 seconds. Shake. Squirt out. Do it again.



**FILL**



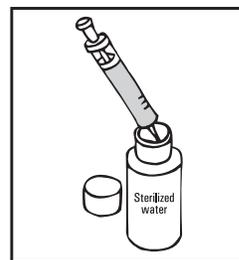
**SHAKE**



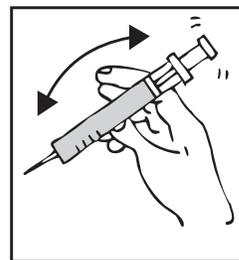
**EMPTY**

## Water rinse x2

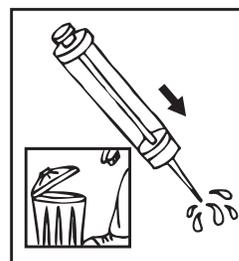
Fill the syringe completely with sterilized water. Shake. Squirt out. (not back into the container). Do it again.



**FILL**



**SHAKE**



**EMPTY**

Clean cooker including spoons with bleach and water. Use a new filter every time. You can get bleach and water from any needle exchange site.

Contact your local AIDS service organization in your community. This number should be in your phone book.

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Ce document est aussi disponible en français.

Canadian AIDS Society

309 Cooper Street, 4th Floor

Ottawa (Canada) K2P 0G5

Tel: (613) 230-3580 / 1-800-499-1986

Fax: (613) 563-4998

Email: [CASinfo@cdnaids.ca](mailto:CASinfo@cdnaids.ca)

Web site: [www.cdnaids.ca](http://www.cdnaids.ca)

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Society*



*Société canadienne  
du sida*

**(613) 230-3580 FAX (613) 563-4998**

**Internet: [www.cdnaids.ca](http://www.cdnaids.ca) E-mail/Courriel: [CASinfo@cdnaids.ca](mailto:CASinfo@cdnaids.ca)**