

AIDS



The Basics

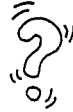
What Is AIDS?

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. AIDS is believed to be caused by a prolonged infection with HIV.



What Is HIV?

HIV stands for Human Immuno-deficiency Virus. HIV slowly breaks down the body's immune system, making it easier for you to get a variety of illnesses, known as "opportunistic infections."



How Do You Become Infected?

A lot (high concentration) of HIV can be found in the **blood** (including menstrual blood), **semen, pre-cum, vaginal fluids, and breast milk** of people infected with the virus.

The most common ways HIV is spread are:

- 1) Unprotected vaginal and anal sex
- 2) Sharing needles for steroid or injection drug use
- 3) An infected mother could transmit HIV to her child. A mother could also transmit HIV to her child through breast milk

Since 1985 all blood products in Canada have been tested for HIV

How Can You Prevent Transmission?

Practice Safer Sex

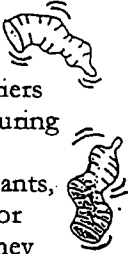
Use latex condoms/latex barriers with water-based lubricants during sex.

Do **NOT** use oil-based lubricants, such as baby oil, hand lotion or petroleum jelly (Vaseline). They weaken the condom allowing HIV to pass through.

Use Clean Needles



To reduce the risk of HIV infection, needles and syringes should never be shared unless thoroughly cleaned with bleach and water.

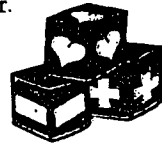


Window Period

The window period is the time between when you are exposed to HIV and when a blood test will be able to measure the antibodies your immune system creates to fight HIV. It can take anywhere from six weeks to six months after HIV enters your body to develop enough antibodies to be measured on an HIV test. There may be some short term symptoms of infection, but without an HIV test you won't know for sure if you have the virus.

Asymptomatic Period

The Asymptomatic period is the time when HIV is in your body but your immune system is strong so there may be no symptoms of infection. The virus may be active and harming your immune system but you can feel as healthy as ever.



Symptomatic Period

The symptomatic period is when HIV becomes more active in your body. The virus has weakened your immune system after living in your body for a while.

Symptoms of HIV infection may begin to appear or re-appear.



AIDS

A person is diagnosed with AIDS when he/she has HIV plus one or more of the illnesses specific to the syndrome. At this stage a person has generally been living with HIV for many years and the immune system is severely damaged. In most cases one of the "opportunistic infections" will eventually cause the **death** of the person living with AIDS.

While AIDS can still be a fatal illness, some drugs are now being used that can reduce HIV's damage to the immune system, delay symptoms, prevent "opportunistic infections" and prolong life.



Should I Be Tested?

If you think you have been doing things that put you at risk for HIV you may want to get tested. If you've been infected the sooner you know the sooner you'll be able to access treatment and support.

If you've been infected with HIV it can take up to six months for your body to produce enough HIV antibodies to be measured in an HIV test.



This means that for up to six months after infection you could continue to test negative for HIV. The virus is active during this period and it's possible to transmit it to others without knowing.

Transmission Equation

Body Fluid with a lot of HIV:
Blood (including menstrual blood), semen, pre-cum, vaginal fluids, and Breast Milk



Activity:

Anal or vaginal intercourse, sharing needles



Direct access for the virus to enter the bloodstream:

Vagina, Anus, Urethra in the Penis, Open Cuts and Sores, points of Needle Injection



RISK OF HIV TRANSMISSION

Getting Tested?

- 1) You can get a confidential test. This is usually done by your family doctor, and there will be a record of the test and the results.
- 2) You can get an anonymous test, which means you don't have to give your name and it won't show up on your medical records. Clinics and health units generally offer anonymous testing and have counselors who can talk with you about any questions you have.

It generally takes about a week for test results to return from the lab. This waiting period can be **VERY** stressful, and if you are not prepared for the possibility of a positive result, you may not be ready to be tested.



What Does Not Cause Infection?

Saliva, Urine, and tears do not transmit the virus. It is safe to share utensils, toilet seats and towels. Casual contacts like kissing, hugging, and touching, as well as caring for someone living with HIV/AIDS is completely safe.



What Will The Test Tell Me?



A Negative Test result can tell you one of two things:

- 1) Either you don't have HIV, or
- 2) You've been infected recently and your body hasn't produced enough antibodies to be measured in a blood test. A negative result doesn't mean you are immune to HIV. You might consider this a good opportunity to look at what you've been doing and what you can do to reduce your risk of infection.



A Positive test result tells you:

You have been infected with HIV.

Being HIV positive does not mean you have AIDS. By regularly monitoring your health and exploring your treatment options, you can slow the progress of HIV and live a longer, healthier life.

If the result is positive you can get support and information about living with HIV. Call your local AIDS Helpline for more information.



What Are The Symptoms Of HIV Infection?

Some people with HIV develop symptoms, which can be like those of many other conditions:

- ◆ Chronic yeast infections in the vagina, in the ears, or on the tongue
- ◆ Frequently tired
- ◆ Diarrhea
- ◆ Dramatic weight loss
- ◆ Swollen lymph glands on the neck and in the armpits
- ◆ Sweating a lot while you sleep
- ◆ Fever that won't go away



Such symptoms are often caused by common illnesses and not by HIV infection. If you have concerns about these symptoms you should check with a doctor or health care practitioner.

For more information on HIV and AIDS, including transmission, prevention, treatment and support



services call:
AIDS Calgary

Awareness Association

By Phone: (403) 508-2500

By Fax: (403) 263-7358

By email: info@aidscalgary.org

At Website: www.aidscalgary.org

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Mission

To reduce the harm associated with HIV and AIDS for all individuals and communities in the Calgary region.

HIV is Human Immunodeficiency Virus
AIDS is Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

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