



What are HIV and AIDS?

HIV is a disease that affects the person who has it, and their partners, friends, and family. New treatments and research help people with HIV and AIDS live longer and better lives.

You can protect your health better when you know more about HIV and AIDS. Knowledge can help you live a long and full life.

The Basics

HIV stands for *human immunodeficiency virus*. It is a virus that affects the immune system. This is the defense system of your body. This virus can lead to AIDS. When you have HIV, it does not mean you have AIDS. People who have HIV can stay healthy for many years with proper treatment. Over time HIV slowly weakens the immune system until it becomes AIDS.

AIDS stands for *acquired immune deficiency syndrome*. A syndrome is a group of symptoms that tell a doctor whether or not you have a disease. When a person has AIDS, his or her body is weak to the point that it no longer fights diseases. Since the body is less able to fight disease, many other health problems appear.

Origins of HIV and AIDS

AIDS made news in the early 1980s. In 1982, the term "acquired immunodeficiency syndrome" or AIDS was first used. The US began to track AIDS cases this same year. The next year, leaders in science found out that AIDS was caused by HIV.

With time and research, it has become clear that HIV and AIDS were around long before 1982. In the 1980s, doctors in Los Angeles and New York saw many gay men with rare types of pneumonia, cancer and other problems.

HIV-1 (the most common type of HIV) was found in a blood sample taken from a man in 1959 in the Congo. The genes in the blood sample suggest that HIV-1 may have come from a single virus in the late 1940s or early 1950s.

In 1999, a research team found HIV-1 in monkeys native to West Africa. They think that HIV-1 spread to humans when hunters came in contact with blood from the monkeys.

There are many myths and ideas about how HIV was spread. Read the last part of this fact sheet for the truth about how you can prevent HIV.

Signs of HIV Infection

One thing that allows HIV to spread is the lack of symptoms at first. Many people with HIV have no signs of illness for 10 years or more. They can still infect other people during this time.

The only way to know if you have HIV is to get tested. A test tells you about your health at one point in time. You should get tested often. It can take three to five months after you have contact with HIV for the virus to show in a test.

When HIV begins to grow and attack the immune system, a person may show signs such as:

- Fever that comes and goes
- Swollen lymph glands in the armpits, groin or neck
- White spots or odd marks on the tongue, mouth or throat
- Red, brown, pink or purple spots under the skin or inside the mouth, nose or eyelids
- Dry cough

- Loose stool that lasts for more than a week
- Lose weight quickly
- Heavy night sweats
- Feel very tired for no reason
- Feel depressed, forget things or have trouble thinking

These symptoms alone do not mean a person has HIV. The flu and other health problems have the same symptoms. Only an HIV test can say for sure if a person has HIV or not.

Ways to Get HIV

You can get or give someone HIV in these ways:

- Sex without a condom with someone who has HIV.
- Share needles or drug works with someone who has HIV.
- A child can get HIV from its mother through the womb, at birth and from breast milk.
- There is a small risk from oral sex without a condom with someone who has HIV. The risk is greater if a partner has cuts or sores in the mouth or on the sex organs.

How to Prevent the Spread of HIV

No matter what your HIV status, you need to take steps to prevent the spread of HIV. To prevent the spread of HIV:

- Use latex condoms every time you have sex. The use of a latex condom the right way can prevent the spread of HIV 80 to 95% of the time. Condoms help reduce the risk of other STDs, too.
- Use plastic wrap or dental dams to help prevent HIV during oral and oral-anal sex.
- Use clean needles. If you use drugs that you inject, use a new, clean needle every time.
- Have sober sex. Drug and alcohol increase the chance that you will have unsafe sex.

- Have fewer partners. You can have sex with only one person at a time or not have sex at all. The fewer sex partners you have, the more you prevent the spread of HIV.

You may want to wait to have sex with someone new. You should be sure the person you are with is someone who has your best interest in mind. If they will not wait, they may not be the right person for you. Trust yourself and what you need.

For more information

Contact your Registered Nurse Care Manager, or call Positive Healthcare's Nurse Advice Line at (800) 797-1717.

