

WHAT IS HIV?

HIV or the Human Immunodeficiency Virus is a virus that is transmitted from one human to another. It is a virus that attacks the human immune system eventually dismantling its ability to function. A person diagnosed with HIV infection is referred to as being HIV positive.

Once HIV enters the bloodstream, it inserts itself into the cells that make up the immune system and then begins to multiply. The HIV virus attacks the immune system slowly making it easier for a person to get a variety of illnesses known as opportunistic infections. In some cases it may take years for a person to start feeling and looking ill as a result of being HIV positive. During this symptom-less or 'asymptomatic period', an HIV positive person can still infect others with the virus.

WHAT IS AIDS?

AIDS stands for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome. AIDS is caused by prolonged infection with HIV. Once HIV infection has significantly weakened an individual's immune system and one or more opportunistic infections are present, a person is diagnosed with AIDS.

WHO CAN GET HIV?

HIV does not discriminate; anyone who has engaged in a risk activity can be infected with HIV regardless of age, gender, economic background, sexual orientation, race, religion, ethnic origin, etc.

HOW MANY PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD ARE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS?

At the end of 2007, it was estimated that 33 million people are living with HIV/AIDS.

HOW MANY CANADIANS ARE INFECTED WITH HIV?

At the end of 2007, it was estimated that between 60,000 to 62,000 people in Canada are living with HIV/AIDS.

HOW MANY PEOPLE IN BRITISH COLUMBIA ARE INFECTED WITH HIV?

At the end of 2006, it was estimated that between 12,200 to 13,000 people in British Columbia are living with HIV/AIDS.

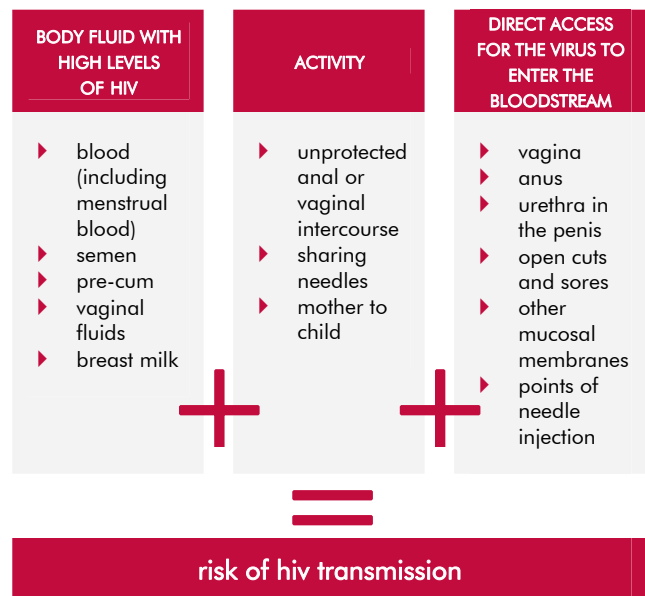
HOW DOES ONE BECOME INFECTED WITH HIV?

HIV is transmitted through the following activities:

- ▶ Unprotected sex – oral, vaginal and anal
- ▶ Sharing needle – tattooing, steroid or injection drug use
- ▶ During pregnancy – birth or breastfeeding from mother to child

Some activities are considered more high risk than others such as, unprotected sex or sharing needles, versus sex with a condom or using a new or sterilized needle. A good way to understand 'HIV risk' is to consider the following transmission equation which helps to illustrate what three things are required to potentially transmit HIV.

RISK OF HIV TRANSMISSION EQUATION



Examples of what does NOT transmit HIV:

- ▶ Saliva and tears
- ▶ Urine
- ▶ Utensils
- ▶ Towels or bed sheets
- ▶ Toilet seats or swimming pools
- ▶ Coughs or sneezes
- ▶ Donating blood
- ▶ Casual contact like kissing, hugging, and touching
- ▶ Caring for someone living with HIV/AIDS



Some factors may increase the risk of HIV infection:

- ▶ Having a sexually transmitted infection such as herpes or syphilis, even without genital sores, puts you at higher risk of transmitting HIV or becoming infected with HIV through sexual contact.
- ▶ Persons newly infected with HIV have higher levels of HIV in the blood and are significantly more infectious during that acute infection period.
- ▶ Persons having sexual relationships with more than one partner within a brief interval of time are more likely to get infected and to pass HIV to others.

HOW CAN YOU PREVENT HIV TRANSMISSION?

Practice safer sex:

- ▶ Use latex condoms, female condoms and latex barriers with water-based lubricants during sex.
- ▶ Use latex condoms and barriers regularly and use them properly.
- ▶ Do not use oil-based lubricants, such as baby oil, hand lotion and petroleum jelly, as they may weaken the condom and allow HIV to pass through.
- ▶ Choose non penetrative forms of sexual play and stimulation, such as kissing, masturbation and sensual massage.

Practice safer injection drug use:

- ▶ Needles and syringes should never be shared or re-used unless sterilized.
- ▶ When new needles are unavailable, needles should be thoroughly cleaned with bleach and water.

Get tested, and if necessary, treated for sexually transmitted infections.

SHOULD I GET TESTED FOR HIV?

If you think you have been engaging in activities that may have put you at risk for HIV transmission, you may want to consider getting tested. If you have tested positive for HIV, knowing your status can enable you to access appropriate information for prevention strategies, treatment and support. If you have tested negative for HIV, you can make choices regarding how to protect yourself and others in the future. Testing is available for everyone. Tests are available at public health units, STI screening sites and/or through your physician.

ONLINE RESOURCES

- ▶ **Center for Disease Control (CDC): HIV Transmission:** www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/factsheets/transmission.htm
- ▶ **The Body: Comprehensive HIV/AIDS Resource:** www.thebody.com
- ▶ **San Francisco AIDS Foundation – AIDS 101:** www.sfaf.org/aids101