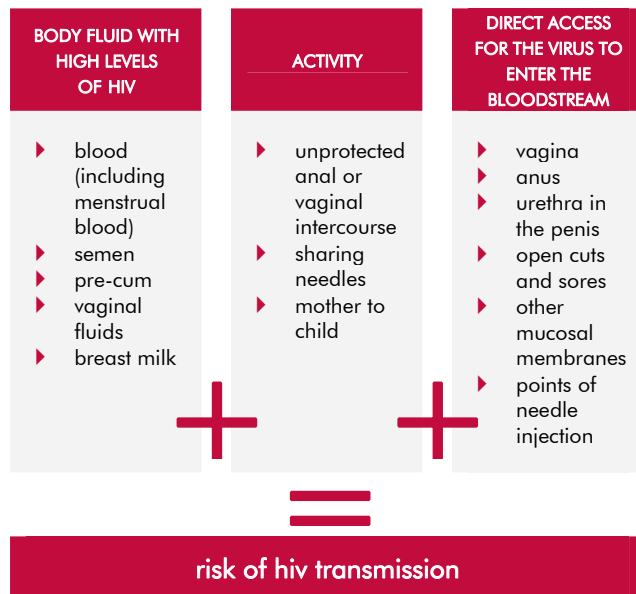


## HOW IS HIV TRANSMITTED?

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is transmitted through the following bodily fluids: blood (including menstrual blood), breast milk, pre-cum, semen and vaginal fluids. For there to be risk of HIV transmission there are three necessary components. First, one of the above mentioned body fluids must be present. Second, individuals must be engaging in an activity that passes these fluids from one person to another. Third, there needs to be direct access to the bloodstream. Skin is the body's greatest defense mechanism against foreign particles. For HIV transmission to potentially occur, an infected fluid must enter directly into the bloodstream. The following "Transmission Equation" is a useful tool in assessing risk:

### RISK OF HIV TRANSMISSION EQUATION



It is also important to remember that some factors, such as having an STI, or having sexual relationships with more than one partner within a brief interval of time, may increase the risk of transmitting or becoming infected with HIV. Persons newly infected with HIV also have higher levels of HIV in the blood and are significantly more infectious during that acute infection period.

## WHAT IS HIV PREVENTION?

To help prevent the transmission of HIV, individuals should be aware of their own HIV status. In an ideal world, individuals would be aware of their partners' status. Unfortunately, this is not always the case due to the following reasons:

- ▶ Difficulty and/or discomfort when discussing previous sexual or drug related history.
- ▶ Difficulty and/or discomfort when discussing sex or sexual issues.
- ▶ Fear of being stigmatized or discriminated against.
- ▶ Difficulty disclosing HIV status for fear of violence, rejection, abandonment, or one's status becoming public knowledge.
- ▶ Person does not consider themselves or their partner(s) to be at risk for HIV.

When one first thinks of HIV prevention, they often think condoms or abstinence. However, it is important to realize that there are more than just these two options.

There are a number of things individuals can do to reduce the risk of HIV transmission. As new barrier methods and interventions are being researched and developed, awareness and education continues to be essential to prevention.

Some individuals falsely assume that they are not at risk for HIV because of stereotypes or judgments about who is considered "high risk". In Canada, populations currently considered most at risk for HIV include gay men, intravenous drug users, and people of Indigenous descent. It is important to keep in mind that HIV does not discriminate and can infect anyone.

Some ways to protect yourself from HIV infection:

### Sexual activity:

- ▶ Abstain from sexual intercourse.
- ▶ Know your status and your partner's status.
- ▶ Get tested and if necessary treated for sexually transmitted infections.
- ▶ Have sex with only one partner, be monogamous (only participate in sex or sexual activities with one other person).
- ▶ Have protected sex using condoms (male or female) correctly and consistently.

- ▶ Know what prevents HIV and what does not; for example, while the birth control pill or spermicides may prevent pregnancy they do not prevent HIV.
- ▶ Engage in activities that are less risky and safer such as kissing, hugging, masturbation, and massage.

#### **Drug use:**

- ▶ Do not share equipment (needles, syringes, pipes, cotton or rinse water).
- ▶ Always use new equipment for each injection.
- ▶ If you share equipment, clean syringes with bleach and water several times. Cleaning syringes is not effective against Hepatitis C.
- ▶ Use community resources such as needle exchange programs.

#### **Mother to child transmission:**

- ▶ Be aware of one's HIV status.
- ▶ Consider taking antiretroviral drugs during pregnancy and labour.
- ▶ Reduce the baby's exposure to mother's bodily fluids by considering the best course of delivery (i.e. caesarean section).
- ▶ Avoid breastfeeding.

#### **Blood transfusions and medical procedures:**

- ▶ All blood supplies are screened in British Columbia and therefore carry no risk of HIV transmission.
- ▶ When travelling, it is advisable to know the medical procedures of the country you are visiting.
- ▶ Ensure a new or sterilized needle is used for each injection.

#### **Tattooing and piercing:**

- ▶ Ensure that the shop is reputable and uses only new or sterilized equipment.
- ▶ Artists should take care not to dip into a large quantity of ink. Instead each individual should have their own small pot of ink as to avoid contamination.
- ▶ Ensure that ink pots are not shared or reused.

#### **Healthcare workers:**

- ▶ Practice universal precautions.
- ▶ Wash hands thoroughly, use protective gloves, eyewear, etc.

#### **WHY DO WE NEED HIV PREVENTION MESSAGES?**

##### **Because:**

- ▶ HIV discriminates against no one; it crosses all continents, countries, cultures, communities and individual as well as collective circumstances.
- ▶ HIV is not visible: you can't tell just by looking at someone whether they are infected with HIV.
- ▶ In Canada, up to 27% of people who are HIV positive don't know it.
- ▶ Every two hours, someone in the country becomes infected with HIV.
- ▶ There is still no vaccine against HIV.

#### **ONLINE RESOURCES**

- ▶ **Avert:** [www.avert.org/prevent-hiv.htm](http://www.avert.org/prevent-hiv.htm)
- ▶ **The Body:** [www.thebody.com](http://www.thebody.com)