

## ACQUIRED IMMUNODEFICIENCY SYNDROME (AIDS)

### What is HIV?

The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a very small germ that causes a weakening of a person's immune system, specifically the CD4 cells, often called T cells. Over time, HIV can destroy so many of these cells that the body can't fight off infections and disease. These infections or cancers take advantage of a very weak immune system and signal that the person has AIDS, the last stage of HIV infection.

### How is HIV spread?

HIV is spread from a person who has HIV through certain body fluids — blood, semen, rectal fluids vaginal fluids. Less often, HIV can be spread from mother to child during pregnancy or breastfeeding or from receiving blood products or transfusions. Most often, people get or spread HIV through sexual behaviors and needle or syringe use.

HIV is not spread by casual contact with an infected person or through the air or water, insects, pets, sharing food, coughs or sneezes. A person cannot get HIV from giving blood at a blood bank or other established blood collection center. Neither will a person get HIV from items such as clothes, phones, toilet seats, spoons, cups, or other objects that someone who is infected with the virus has used.

### What are the signs and symptoms of HIV/AIDS?

Symptoms alone won't tell whether a person has HIV. The only way to know for sure is to get tested. The symptoms of HIV vary, depending on the individual and what stage of the disease a person is in: early stage, clinical latency stage, or AIDS (the late stage of HIV infection).

- Early stage: Within 2 to 4 weeks after infection with HIV, people may experience a flu-like illness, which may last for a few weeks.
- Clinical latency stage: This stage is also called chronic HIV infection. People in this stage may not have any HIV-related symptoms, or only mild ones. This period can last a decade or longer for people who aren't taking medicine to treat HIV.
- AIDS: rapid weight loss, recurring fever or profuse night sweats, extreme and unexplained tiredness, prolonged swelling of the lymph glands in the armpits, groin, or neck, diarrhea that lasts for more than a week, sores of the mouth, anus, or genitals, pneumonia, red, brown, pink, or purplish blotches on or under the skin or inside the mouth, nose, or eyelids, memory loss, depression, and other neurologic disorders. Each of these symptoms can also be related to other illnesses.

HIV can affect anyone. But, some people are at greater risk because of who they have sex with (gay and bisexual men have the highest risk), risk behaviors (injecting drugs), and having unprotected sex.

### **What type of health problems are caused by HIV?**

Today, over one million people live with HIV. Due to advanced treatments, people are living longer and have a better quality of life. However, many people with HIV still develop severe illnesses called opportunistic infections because they may not know of their HIV infection, they may not be on treatment, or their treatment may not be working well enough for their immune system to fight off infections. HIV can eventually progress to AIDS which can result in death.

### **How is HIV diagnosed?**

There are different types of tests that are used to detect HIV and may be performed on blood, oral fluid, or urine. Most HIV tests are blood tests that can detect HIV antibodies (substances made by the body in response to the virus) when infected. Usually, the body forms antibodies about six weeks after exposure to HIV. A person could be infected with HIV even though an antibody test result is negative if tested during this "window period."

If you suspect you may be at risk of being infected with HIV, talk with your healthcare provider or someone who works at an HIV counseling and testing center about having an HIV antibody test performed. Any woman who is considering having a baby and thinks she might be at risk for HIV infection should seek counseling and testing before getting pregnant.

### **How is HIV treated?**

HIV is treated by taking medicines called antiretrovirals (ARV). These medicines may be given with other ARV to slow the progression of HIV and keep you as healthy as possible.

### **How can HIV be prevented?**

- Don't have sex with an infected person
- Limiting the number of sexual partners
- Never share needles
- Use condoms the right way every time you have sex.

### **Where can I get more information?**

- Your personal healthcare provider
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Utah Department of Health](#)
- [Utah AIDS Foundation](#) (801-487-2323)
- CDC Health Information Hotline (1-800-232-4636)

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