

What Does HIV Stand For?

H “Human” – This particular virus can only infect human beings.

I “Immunodeficiency” – HIV weakens your immune system by destroying important cells that fight disease and infection. A “deficient” immune system can’t protect you.

V “Virus” – A virus can only reproduce itself by taking over a cell in the body of its host.

What does it do?

HIV can exist for long periods of time in your body while it attacks your immune system – your T-cells or CD4 cells. These cells fight infections and disease, but HIV invades them, uses them to make more copies of itself, and ultimately destroys them. Over time, HIV can destroy so many of your CD4 cells that your body can’t fight infections and diseases anymore. When that happens, HIV infection can lead to AIDS. HIV is preventable. It is preventable by understanding how it is transmitted, and not putting oneself at risk.

Although there is no cure for HIV or AIDS both are treatable. There are effective medications and medical treatment protocols, as well as mental health support, traditional practices and social services that can help people live long well balanced and productive lives. Being diagnosed with HIV/AIDS is not a “death sentence.”

How is HIV Transmitted?

HIV is transmitted from one person to another when the following infected fluids enter the bloodstream of another person:

- Blood;
- Semen and pre-ejaculation fluid;
- Vaginal fluids;
- Breast milk

How can I get infected with HIV?

- Sex - having anal, vaginal or oral sex without a condom or dental dam;
- Needles - sharing needles, equipment, or paraphernalia that has not been cleaned properly to inject drugs, steroids or vitamins or perform body piercing, tattoos or become “blood brothers;”
- Mother to child - through pregnancy, birth or breast feeding.

Can you tell me ways that HIV is NOT transmitted?

- Casual Contact;
- Hugging ;
- Kissing;
- Shaking hands;
- Sharing forks, spoons, knives;
- Spending time together like working, school, powwows or ceremonies;
- Swimming in a public pool;
- Using a telephone;
- Using a public or private bathroom or outhouse;



- Coughing or sneezing;
- Being bitten by an insect;
- Sharing food or drink with someone who has HIV or that they prepared;
- Touching or being around someone who is sneezing or coughing.

What are the Symptoms?

At the time of infection:

- Many people do not feel anything when they are infected.
- Some people will have a fever, headaches, sore throat, or develop a rash.

After Diagnosis:

- Years later, many people still feel fine.
- Other people feel sick, including:
 - More infections (like colds, pneumonias);
 - Sores in mouth;
 - Shingles;
 - Rashes or skin infections;
 - Headaches;
 - Diarrhea;
 - Fever, weight loss, sweating at night, weakness.

These symptoms could also be due to other medical conditions, therefore it's important to discuss your health with your healthcare providers.

Why is it important to know my Status?

By knowing your HIV status, either negative or positive, you can make healthy life decisions. The only way to find out your status is to get tested for HIV.

If Positive:

- With early HIV diagnosis and treatment people can live long and relatively healthy lives;
- HIV can be treated with eating healthy, physical activity and medication;
- Even if you feel fine, HIV can slowly result in more symptoms as your body gets more out of balance;
- HIV medications alleviate symptoms and keep you healthier.

If Negative:

- You can choose to take precautions to decrease your risks of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections;
- Continue to practice safe sex and safe injection practices.

How do I know I am at Risk?

You are at risk if you have had sex with someone who has (or had) sex with other people, if you have shared needles with anyone, or if you have ever had a tattoo given to you by someone who is not a professional tattoo artist.

What Should I do if I am at Risk?

Talk to your local clinic or service provider about your specific risks and about getting an HIV test. This is the first step.

The only way to know for sure is to GET TESTED
Take the Test, Protect Our People!

