

Facts & DETAILS

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)

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What is HIV?

HIV is a virus that attacks the immune system. Untreated HIV infection can destroy the immune system, so the body cannot fight off infections and disease. When this happens, HIV infection can lead to Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

How common is HIV?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that there are around 1.1 million people living with HIV infections in the United States. Around 38,000 new HIV infections and 40,000 new HIV diagnoses are reported each year in the United States.

How do people become infected?

The HIV virus must enter into your blood in order to become infected. Certain behaviors put individuals at an increased risk for getting HIV. These behaviors include:

- Having unprotected sex (without a condom) with multiple partners or with someone who has had many partners
- Sharing needles or other equipment to inject drugs
- An infected mother can spread HIV to her baby during birth or through breastfeeding

You **cannot** become infected with HIV through casual contact. Casual contact includes being coughed or sneezed on, using the same water fountain or swimming pool, shaking hands, hugging, or eating food prepared by an infected individual.

What are the signs and symptoms of HIV?

Early HIV symptoms include flu-like symptoms, enlarged lymph nodes, sore throat, and rash. HIV affects specific cells of the immune system, causing it to weaken. As the immune system weakens, common, usually mild illnesses, such as a cold, may require hospitalization.

How long can you spread HIV?

It can take up to 6 months after exposure for an HIV test to be positive. Someone with HIV can transmit the virus for their entire life, although antiviral medications can reduce this risk.

Who is at risk for HIV?

Anyone who has a sexually transmitted infection (STI) is at a higher risk of getting HIV. Other high risk groups include men who have sex with men, people with multiple sex partners, people who have unprotected sex, and injection drug users.

How is HIV treated?

Although HIV and AIDS cannot be cured, long-term antiviral medications can be used to reduce the amount of virus in the blood and body fluids. These medications help prevent other infections and reduce the risk of transmitting HIV to others.



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How can you prevent HIV?

There is no vaccine to prevent HIV. Some ways to prevent infection include:

- Use a condom correctly every time you have sex
- Reduce the number of sexual partners
- Get tested and treated for other STIs
- Do not use intravenous (IV) drugs. Never share drugs, needles, or syringes.
- If you are at high risk for HIV infection, discuss pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) with your healthcare provider. Follow all instructions to take the medication correctly.
- If you have been exposed to HIV, discuss post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) with your healthcare provider immediately. PEP can significantly reduce your risk for contracting HIV if started promptly.

If you think you have been exposed to HIV, you should receive an HIV screening test. Since it can take up to six months after HIV exposure for a test to be positive, someone who believes they may be at risk but had a negative first test should have the test repeated in six months.

HIV testing, counseling, and referral services can be done at the Sedgwick County Division of Health, 2716 West Central Avenue, Wichita, Kansas.

For More Information:
Sedgwick County Division of Health
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