

# Fact Sheet: HIV / AIDS

## What is HIV?

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) damages cells in the immune (defense) system that helps to protect us by fighting off infection and disease. As the virus gradually destroys these cells, the immune system becomes unable to protect against illness.

## What is AIDS?

Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is stage three of the HIV infection. AIDS is caused by HIV, which weakens the immune system over a period of time. However, a positive HIV test result does NOT mean that a person has AIDS. A diagnosis of AIDS is made on the basis of the person's symptoms and results of lab tests (CD4 counts, viral load counts). Having an AIDS diagnosis does not always mean someone cannot attain an undetectable viral load.

## How is it spread?

Getting HIV infected blood, precum, semen, or vaginal fluids into your body in any way can put you at risk. This includes having unprotected anal, oral or vaginal sex and sharing needles or drug works. You can't tell by looking at a person if they have HIV. An infected woman can spread the virus to her baby during pregnancy, delivery or through breast milk. However, with proper treatment the chance of passing the virus from the mother to the newborn baby is greatly reduced.

## You cannot get the virus from:

- Casual contact with people who have HIV
- Tears, saliva, sweat, feces, urine or vomit
- Handling objects that have been touched by someone who has the virus
- Donating blood
- Mosquito bites

## What are the symptoms?

The only way to know for sure if you have HIV is to get tested. Most people DO NOT feel ill due to HIV for an average of 8 to 10 years after being infected with the virus. Some people may feel flu-like symptoms (fever, chills, night sweats, muscle aches, sore throat, etc.) within 2-4 weeks after infection. Having these symptoms does not mean you have HIV.

## How is it treated?

Today there are medical treatments that can slow down the rate at which HIV weakens the immune system and reduce the amount of virus in someone infected with HIV. There are also treatments that can prevent or cure some of the illnesses associated with AIDS. Medical treatments today, prolong the lives of people living with HIV and improve their quality of life.

**Early detection** offers more options for treatment and preventive care. Unfortunately, HIV and AIDS are not curable.

## Preventing HIV with PrEP

PrEP, or pre-exposure prophylaxis, is daily medicine that can reduce your chance of getting HIV. PrEP can stop HIV from taking hold and spreading throughout your body. Daily PrEP reduces the risk of getting HIV from sex by more than 90%. Among people who inject drugs, it reduces the risk by more than 70%. Your risk of getting HIV from sex can be even lower if you combine PrEP with other prevention methods. PrEP is safe to take if you're on hormones or if you drink alcohol, use street drug or if you are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. To find out if PrEP is right for you talk with your doctor or call Washtenaw County Public Health at (734) 544-6840.

## Who should be tested?

- If you have ever shared needles for injecting drugs
- If you know or suspect that your sex partner(s) has had multiple partners, used injection drugs, or had sex with prostitutes
- If you or your sex partner(s) have had a sexually transmitted infection (STI)
- If you have hemophilia or have had sex without a condom with a person with hemophilia
- If you have had a needle stick or other blood product exposure
- If you have had anal, vaginal or oral sex without a condom
- If you are pregnant (it is best to be tested before getting pregnant, if you have any of the above risks)
- If you have had sex with someone who exchanges sex for money or if you have more than one sexual partner

## Where can I get tested?

You can be tested free of charge at the:

Washtenaw County Public Health  
Sexual Health Services, Suite 1103  
555 Towner St.  
Ypsilanti, MI 48198

**Testing is by appointment ONLY.  
Call (734) 544-6840 to schedule an  
appointment or for more information.**

- Anonymous testing is available.
- All tests are confidential.
- Rapid testing is available.

Other community sites offer HIV testing or you can talk with your own health care provider.

## How is HIV prevented?

- People living with HIV on ART medication consistently.
- People at risk for HIV on PrEP.
- Use a new, latex condom with lubricant every time you have sex.
- Know your sex partner's history of STIs and drug use.
- Have regular STI exams and HIV tests if you are sexually active.
- Know your HIV status and the status of your partner(s). Consider being tested before having sex.
- Remember, you won't automatically be tested for HIV when you go for a medical exam. Ask to be tested if you're at risk.
- If you are a health care worker, follow routine barrier precautions, and handle needles and other sharps safely.
- Don't share needles, other injectable equipment, toothbrushes, eating utensils or razors that could be contaminated with blood or body fluids.
- Don't shoot drugs. If you do shoot drugs, stop and get into a treatment program. If you can't stop, NEVER reuse or share your drug works. Contact your local health department for more information on cleaning your works, and about syringe access programs.
- If you are thinking about getting a tattoo or body piercing, remember that you can get infected if the tools haven't been cleaned properly, or if the artist doesn't wear clean gloves with each new customer.

*This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).*



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