

HIV/AIDS

What is HIV/AIDS?

Human immunodeficiency virus, or **HIV**, is the virus that causes acquired immune deficiency syndrome (**AIDS**). The virus weakens a person's ability to fight infections and **cancer**. People with HIV are said to have AIDS when they develop certain infections or cancers or when their CD4 count is less than 200. CD4 count is determined by a blood test in a doctor's office.

Having HIV does not always mean that you have AIDS. It can take many years for people with the virus to develop AIDS. *HIV and AIDS cannot be cured*. Although people with AIDS will likely one day die from an AIDS-related illness, there are ways to help people stay healthy and live longer.

How is HIV/AIDS spread?

A person gets HIV when an infected person's body fluids (blood, semen, fluids from the vagina or breast milk) enter his or her bloodstream. The virus can enter the blood through linings in the mouth, anus or sex organs (the penis and vagina), or through broken skin.

Who is at risk of getting HIV/AIDS?

People who have unprotected sex. This means vaginal or anal intercourse without a condom or oral sex without a latex barrier with a person infected with HIV. Persons who **share needles** to inject drugs or steroids with an infected person. The disease can also be transmitted by dirty needles used to make a tattoo or in body piercing. People who have **received a blood transfusion** from an infected person. This is very unlikely in the U.S. and Western Europe, where all blood is tested for HIV infection. People who **are born to a mother with HIV infection**. A baby can also get HIV from the breast milk of an infected woman. Health care workers are also at risk on the job and should take special precautions.

Does HIV have symptoms and what are the symptoms of AIDS?

Some people get flu-like symptoms a month or two after they have been infected. These symptoms often go away within a week to a month. A person can have HIV for many years before feeling ill.

As the disease progresses, both women and men may experience yeast infections on the tongue (thrush), and women may develop severe vaginal yeast infections or pelvic inflammatory disease.

Signs that HIV is turning into AIDS include: A fever that won't go away, sweating while you sleep, feeling tired all the time (not from stress or lack of sleep), feeling sick all the time, losing weight, or swollen glands (neck, groin or underarms).

Where can I get more information?

<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/>