



HIV & AIDS FACT SHEET

What are HIV and AIDS?

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a virus that attacks the immune system (the body's defense against infection) killing your body's "CD4 cells" or T-helper cells. These cells help your body fight off infection and disease. With this break down of the immune system, the body is more susceptible to illness.

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is the late stage of HIV infection. An HIV positive person is diagnosed with AIDS when the immune system is so weakened that it can no longer fight off illness. As a result, people are more susceptible to opportunistic infections (e.g. pneumonia and various forms of cancer).

Can AIDS be cured?

No, there is no known cure or vaccine for AIDS. Although anti-viral medications and health behaviors can improve the quality and length of life for some individuals with this diagnosis, these medications do no work for everyone and may cause many harmful side effects.

How do I know if I have HIV/AIDS?

Since people with HIV may have few to no symptoms for several years once they are infected, the only way to know if you have HIV is to get tested. 1 out of 4 Americans with HIV do not know they have the virus. The Center for Disease Control has recently recommended that Americans receive routine HIV testing as part of regular preventative health. Anyone who is participating or has participated in activities that involve the exchange of HIV transmittable fluids should be tested for HIV. It is important to know your status. If you test negative, you can find out how to keep from getting infected in the future. If you test positive, you can take advantage of the advances in antiviral medications to maintain a healthy lifestyle and learn how to prevent passing HIV to others.

Facts

HIV can be found in body fluids, including:

- blood
- semen

- vaginal fluids
- breast milk
- some body fluids sometimes handled by healthcare workers (fluids surrounding the brain and spinal cord, bone joints, and around an unborn baby)

HIV is passed from one person to another by:

- having sex (vaginal, anal, or oral) with a person who has HIV
- sharing needles with a drug user who has HIV
- during pregnancy, birth, or breast-feeding if a mother has HIV
- getting a blood transfusion from a person with HIV

Abstaining from (not having) sex is the most effective way to prevent HIV transmission. There are several ways to protect yourself or to prevent transmitting HIV during vaginal, oral, or anal sex if you choose to have sex:

- Get tested for HIV and know the HIV status of yourself and your partner
- Be faithful to your sexual partner
- Use latex condoms or other latex barriers during vaginal, oral, and anal sex, and never reuse condoms or latex barriers

HIV cannot be transmitted by casual contact. Here are the facts:

- You cannot get HIV from shaking hands or hugging a person with HIV/AIDS
- You cannot get HIV from a closed-mouth kiss (but there is a very small chance of getting it from open-mouthed or “French” kissing with an infected person because of possible blood contact)
- You cannot get HIV from using a public telephone, drinking fountain, restroom, swimming pool, Jacuzzi, or hot tub
- You cannot get HIV from sharing a drink
- You cannot get HIV from being coughed or sneezed on by a person with HIV/AIDS
- You cannot get HIV from giving blood
- You cannot get HIV from a mosquito or other insect bite or sting

Transmission of HIV while getting a tattoo or through a body piercing is possible, but it can be prevented through:

- Single-use instruments intended to penetrate the skin being used only once, then disposed of
- Reusable instruments or devices that penetrate the skin and/or contact a client's blood should be thoroughly cleaned and sterilized between clients according to medical guidelines

These guidelines are the same as those practiced within any medical facility where there is a risk of instruments coming into contact with blood.

What should you do if you think you have exposed yourself to HIV?

If you think you've been exposed to HIV, you should immediately seek help from your local health authority to receive counseling and testing for HIV. You might also be prescribed antiretroviral drugs, if within 72 hours of exposure to potentially HIV-infected blood or body fluids, to prevent HIV sero conversion. This is called "post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV infection" (HIV-PEP). However HIV-PEP is not 100% effective, even when started very shortly after exposure, so it is vitally important to try to take every measure to prevent transmission of HIV in the first place. It is also crucial that you take every precaution to prevent transmitting HIV to others should you become infected with HIV.

BSCTC has certified HIV/AIDS counselors that may assist you with your referral needs. If you have questions, please contact one of the following:

Paula J. Gibson, ext. 64714

Janie Beverly, ext. 67359

Randy Haney, ext. 82939

Elizabeth Cole, ext. 81215

Jeanie Howard, ext 64735

*Information above from websites hyperlinked below.

To learn more about the facts of HIV/AIDS, please visit one of the following websites:
<http://aids.gov/> ; <http://www.cdc.gov> .

Additional Links:

1. <http://www.macromedia.com/go/getflashplayer>
2. http://www.niaid.nih.gov/vrc/clintrials/clin_about.htm
3. <http://www.pepfar.gov/>
4. <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/aids.html>
5. <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/press/hivp05pr.htm>
6. <http://www.hiv.va.gov/vahiv?page=we-00-00>
7. <http://www.fda.gov/oashi/patrep/patientrep.html>
8. <http://hiv.drugabuse.gov/>