

Know the facts : HIV transmission and testing / NAT.

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Know the Facts

HIV Transmission and Testing



What is HIV?

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. HIV attacks the body's immune system – the body's defence against disease – so that it can no longer fight off certain infections.

What is AIDS?

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. We say that a person has AIDS when the immune system has become so weak that it can no longer fight off a whole range of diseases with which it would normally cope.

There are four main routes by which HIV can be transmitted:

Through unprotected vaginal or anal sex

Whatever your sexuality, it doesn't matter. If you have vaginal or anal sex with someone who has HIV, and you don't use a condom, you can become infected with HIV.

Sharing needles

If you share needles or other drug injecting equipment that contains traces of HIV infected blood, you can become infected with HIV. Hepatitis C can also be transmitted this way.

Mother to baby

If a pregnant woman has HIV, she can pass it on to her child in three ways: during pregnancy, during birth, or through breastfeeding. However, there are proven steps mothers can take to reduce the possibility of their unborn child contracting HIV.

Infected blood

You can become infected with HIV by receiving infected blood or blood products as part of a medical treatment. In the UK the chance of this happening is remote as all blood, blood products and donated organs are screened for HIV and infected materials destroyed.

HIV is a virus that causes the incurable and life-threatening medical condition called AIDS

How safe is oral sex?

Oral sex is where one partner uses their tongue or mouth to stimulate their partner's genitals. There is a very low risk of HIV transmission from oral sex; it is much less risky than vaginal or anal sex without a condom. The risk can be further reduced by:

- Avoiding getting semen or pre-ejaculatory fluid in the mouth, particularly if there are any cuts, sores or ulcers in the mouth.
- Using a condom for oral sex with a man or a dental dam (a latex square) for oral sex with a woman.

It's also worth remembering that other sexually transmitted infections, such as syphilis, herpes and gonorrhoea, can quite easily be transmitted through oral sex.

HIV cannot be transmitted by:

- Kissing
- Toilet seats
- Touching
- Swimming pools
- Through spitting or sneezing
- Insect or animal bites
- Sharing eating utensils

Is there an HIV vaccine?

Not yet. There are several potential vaccines undergoing extensive trials at the moment, but even if they prove to be of benefit it will be some years before they are widely available.


Is there a cure for HIV?

No. Although there are new drugs to keep HIV under control, they do not completely get rid of the virus. Because there is no cure, once a person becomes infected with HIV they stay infected for the rest of their lives.

There is currently NO vaccine to prevent HIV and AIDS and THERE IS NO CURE.

How can I protect myself from HIV?

The best way to protect yourself from HIV is by consistent and proper use of condoms. Condoms must be used with care if they are to be most effective. Only use water based lubricants with condoms as others can damage the condom and cause breaks and tears.

Always make sure your condoms meet the stringent requirements of the British standards Kitemark – look for the Kitemark () on the packaging. Also look for the European CE safety mark (CE).

You can get free condoms from most sexual health and family planning clinics.

Keep in mind that talking to your partner about using a condom is a great way to ensure you both feel comfortable and safe.

PEP (Post Exposure Prophylaxis) is a course of medication which may stop you becoming HIV positive after exposure to HIV. It must be taken within 72 hours of possible exposure. You can ask for PEP treatment from a sexual health clinic or at your nearest hospital Accident & Emergency department. Find out more about PEP at www.tht.org.uk/pep or call the THT helpline on 0845 1221200. PEP must be taken for 28 days and can cause unpleasant side-effects. It is not a substitute for condom use.

What is an HIV test?

An HIV test is a simple blood test which checks for antibodies to HIV. Antibodies are your body's response to a viral infection.

An HIV negative result means you do not have HIV antibodies in your blood.

HIV antibodies do not appear in your blood the day you are infected. Rather, HIV antibodies may take up to three months to show in your blood. Because of this some people who test negative may be advised to have another HIV test at a later date. However, if you are concerned that you may have been at risk you should seek advice immediately.

An HIV positive result indicates HIV antibodies were found in your blood and you have been infected. This means that you can pass HIV on to others. You may benefit from treatments.

The best way to protect yourself from HIV is by consistent and proper use of condoms.

Where can I have an HIV test?

Most tests are carried out by NHS sexual health (GUM) clinics. You can find out more about clinics in your area by calling the Sexual Health Helpline on 0800 567 123. Alternatively you may choose to go to your GP, although this way your test and results will go on your medical record.

Is the test confidential?

If you go to a sexual health (GUM) clinic or an HIV testing centre to have the test, the results are completely confidential and will not appear on your medical record.

If you choose to have an HIV test through your GP it will be retained on your medical record. You may like to keep in mind that employers can ask to see your medical records. Also, insurance companies and mortgage lenders may ask you if you have ever tested positive for HIV.

Will I have to pay to take the test?

No. All National Health Service sexual health clinics offer the test for free.

HIV testing is free and confidential at a sexual health (GUM) clinic.

What about support?

You should always be offered pre and post-test discussion. So whatever the result, you should receive help and advice from a trained professional. If you test positive you will be told about all your options; there are treatments available to help control the effects of the virus and to prevent you developing AIDS.

This leaflet only provides the basics on HIV transmission and testing. For more detailed information and advice on safer sex, HIV and AIDS call the Sexual Health Helpline on 0800 567 123 anytime.

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The worldwide picture

- There are 38 million people living with HIV and AIDS worldwide.
- There are more than 13 million orphans as a direct result of HIV and AIDS.
- Since AIDS was identified over 25 years ago more than 25 million people have died.

The UK picture

- Over 70,000 people are now living with HIV.
- Over a third of these 70,000 people are unaware they are infected.
- There were around 7,000 new diagnoses of HIV in the UK in 2006.



The National AIDS Trust is the UK's leading independent policy and campaigning voice on HIV and AIDS.

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