

What everyone should know about HIV : act aware, be aware: find out the facts at WWW.HIVAWARE.ORG.UK / NAT.

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Everyone's experience is different. Many people find it difficult to come to terms with their diagnosis but some people living with HIV feel empowered by their HIV status and many people actually look after themselves, eat better and lead a healthier lifestyle after receiving an HIV diagnosis.

WHAT'S IT LIKE LIVING WITH HIV?

Although excellent treatments are now available and most people on HIV treatment now just take one or two pills a day, they may experience side effects such as nausea, diarrhoea, weight loss and changes in body shape. Relationships can be difficult to begin or maintain, as some people feel unable to cope with having an HIV positive partner. Mental health can also be affected as people living with HIV come to terms with their diagnosis and other people's reactions.

However, many people living with HIV continue to lead active and fulfilling lives – and they can work, have relationships and have children.

If someone has told you they are HIV positive they may be placing a lot of trust in you. It is very important that you respect this and don't pass on this information without their permission.

WHAT IF SOME ONE TELLS ME THEY HAVE HIV?

There is no need to treat someone living with HIV any differently to how you treat anyone else and your reaction can make a big difference to how they feel about their HIV status. If the person with HIV is a sexual partner you should make sure you use a condom to protect yourself from HIV infection.

Remember, under the Equality Act (2010), it is illegal to discriminate against someone because they are HIV positive.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION VISIT
WWW.HIVAWARE.ORG.UK

FIND OUT THE FACTS ABOUT HIV
AND HOW YOU CAN ACT AWARE AT
WWW.HIVAWARE.ORG.UK

WITH THANKS TO OUR FUNDERS WHO
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THESE RESOURCES



NAT is the UK's leading charity dedicated to transforming society's response to HIV. We provide fresh thinking, expertise and practical resources. We champion the rights of people living with HIV and campaign for change



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WHAT EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HIV



FIND OUT THE FACTS AT
WWW.HIVAWARE.ORG.UK

WHAT ARE HIV AND AIDS?

HIV is a virus that attacks the body's immune system - the body's defence against diseases. A person with HIV is considered to have AIDS when the immune system is so weak it can no longer fight off a range of diseases that it would normally cope with.

There are effective treatments available that can keep the virus under control and the immune system healthy. So as long as they are diagnosed early and receive treatment, most people will not develop AIDS.

IS THERE A CURE FOR HIV?

No, there is no cure for HIV. Once a person becomes infected with HIV they will have the virus for the rest of their life. But people on HIV treatment can live healthy, active lives. If diagnosed early, a person living with HIV in the UK can expect a near-normal life span.

HOW IS HIV PASSED ON?

HIV can be passed on through infected semen, vaginal and anal fluid secretions, blood and breast milk. The most common ways HIV is passed on are:

- Sex with someone living with HIV without using a condom. (95% of people diagnosed with HIV in the UK last year were infected through sexual contact).
- Sharing infected needles, syringes or other drug injecting equipment.
- From an HIV positive mother to her child during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding. (However, there are steps mothers can take to reduce this possibility and in the UK only 1 in 100 babies born to HIV positive mothers have HIV).

Oral sex carries a much lower risk than penetrative sex, but HIV can still be passed on if the person performing oral sex has cuts, bleeding gums or ulcers in their mouth which come into contact with infected bodily fluids.

HIV is not passed on through:

- Kissing or touching
- Spitting, coughing or sneezing
- Shared facilities such as toilet seats or swimming pools
- Biting
- Shared glasses, cups or utensils

AM I LIKELY TO GET HIV?

If you are sexually active or use needles or other injecting equipment you could be at risk of HIV.

In the UK some groups have higher rates of infection, particularly gay and bisexual men and black African men and women. People in these groups who are sexually active, and people having sex with them, are recommended to test regularly for HIV.

HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF FROM HIV?

Always use a condom when having vaginal or anal sex. A condom is the only effective way to prevent HIV infection during sexual intercourse.

You may also want to use a condom or dental dam when performing oral sex although the risk of transmission of HIV is much lower. Always follow the instructions for use and use a condom that meets the British Standard and carries the Kitemark symbol. You can get free condoms from a sexual health clinic, which you can locate at www.fpa.org.uk/Findaclinic

Never share needles, or any other injecting equipment.

ARE THERE EARLY SYMPTOMS OF HIV?

70 to 90 per cent of people with HIV have some early symptoms, usually about 10 days after infection. The most common symptoms are fever, rash and severe sore throat all occurring together. This combination of symptoms is unusual in an otherwise healthy person and indicates the need for an HIV test. These symptoms disappear after two to three weeks and then a person can seem healthy for a number of years.

It is important to remember that not everybody experiences symptoms of early HIV infection so you should not assume you don't have HIV just because you do not experience symptoms.

WHAT DO I DO IF I THINK I HAVE PUT MYSELF AT RISK?

If you think you have been exposed to the risk of HIV infection you should take an HIV test.

If you are unsure if you should have a test, take our online survey at www.HIVaware.org.uk

If it is under 72 hours since possible exposure to HIV you can ask for Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) - a course of medication which may stop you from becoming infected - from a sexual health clinic or Accident and Emergency (A&E) Department.

PEP has to be taken daily for a month and it can cause unpleasant side effects. It is not a substitute for condom use. Find out more at www.tht.org.uk/pep

You can get a free and confidential test at your local sexual health clinic, which you can locate at www.fpa.org.uk/Findaclinic

WHERE CAN I GET AN HIV TEST?

You can also ask your GP or private doctor about an HIV test though the results will be kept on your medical record.

HOW LONG DO I HAVE TO WAIT TO GET AN HIV TEST?

HIV tests have improved enormously in recent years and it is now possible to reliably detect HIV from one month after infection.

DO I HAVE TO GIVE BLOOD IN ORDER TO BE TESTED FOR HIV?

The most common test involves taking a small sample of blood and sending it off to a laboratory but there are now HIV tests available that use blood spots or saliva to test for HIV.

I DON'T KNOW ANYONE WITH HIV... DO I?

There are over 90,000 people living with HIV in the UK and between 6,000 and 7,000 people are newly diagnosed each year. Over a quarter of people living with HIV in the UK don't know they are infected and even if someone knows they are living with HIV, they may not feel able to tell you. So you may know someone who is HIV positive and just be unaware of it.

WHY DO PEOPLE FIND IT HARD TO TELL OTHERS THEY ARE HIV POSITIVE?

Many people living with HIV worry that friends, family or colleagues will reject them or they will experience prejudice if they tell others about their HIV. Some HIV positive people experience discrimination at work, within their local community and even in healthcare settings (e.g. GPs and dentists).

HIV positive people may have fears about how others will react so prefer to keep their HIV status to themselves.