

HIV : reality : discover real stories about HIV in the UK : understanding the facts is key to fighting prejudice and protecting yourself and others / Aware Ltd.

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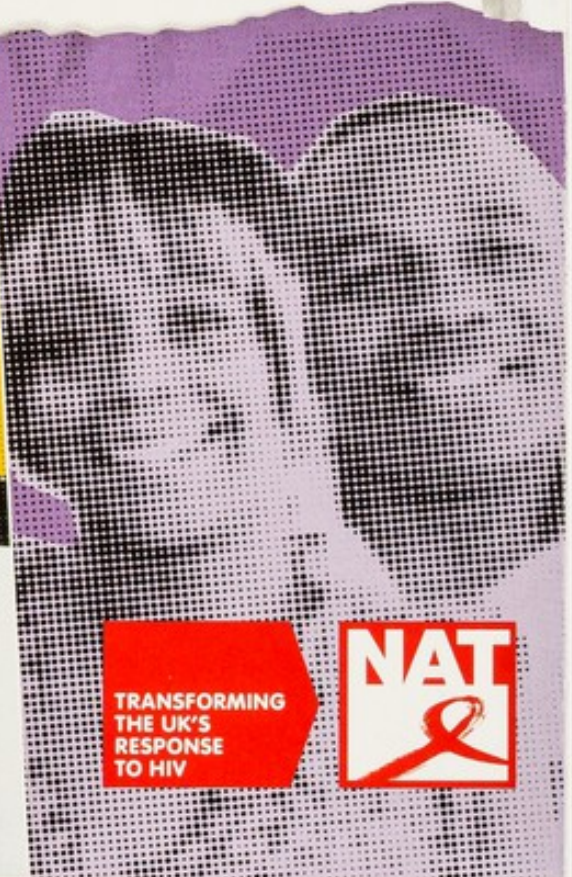
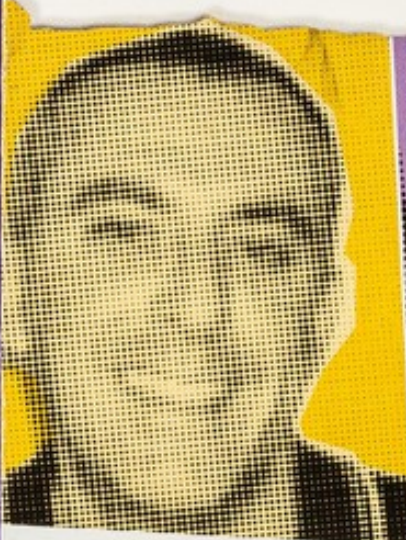
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RESPECT
PROTECT 

HIV: Reality

DISCOVER REAL STORIES ABOUT HIV IN THE UK.
Understanding the facts is key to fighting prejudice and
protecting yourself and others. www.worldAIDSday.org



TRANSFORMING
THE UK'S
RESPONSE
TO HIV



What is HIV?

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) attacks the body's immune system, preventing it from fighting off diseases. When someone is diagnosed as having HIV in their body they are described as being HIV positive. Without treatment the immune system will eventually become too weak to fight off other illnesses, at this stage people are considered to have AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). With treatment most people who are HIV positive will not develop AIDS.

How is HIV passed on?

HIV is passed on through infected blood, semen, vaginal fluids or breast milk. The most common ways HIV is passed on are:

- ▶ Through unprotected sex with someone living with HIV
- ▶ Sharing infected needles, syringes or other injecting equipment
- ▶ From an HIV positive mother to her child during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding
- ▶ Oral sex carries a very low risk, but if cuts, ulcers or diseased gums come into contact with infected bodily fluids HIV could be passed on.

HIV is not passed on through:

- ▶ Kissing or touching
- ▶ Biting
- ▶ Spitting, coughing or sneezing
- ▶ Toilet seats, swimming pools or shared utensils.

How can I protect myself and others from HIV?

No matter what your HIV status is, **respecting and protecting** yourself is important to look after yourself and others.

- ▶ Using a condom during sex (especially vaginal or anal sex) is the best way to protect yourself and your partner from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- ▶ Never share needles or injecting equipment with other people.
- ▶ If you are pregnant have an HIV test.
- ▶ If you want to be a parent and are living with HIV speak to your doctor about steps you can take to significantly reduce the risk of your child contracting HIV during pregnancy and birth.
- ▶ A treatment called Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) is available if you have very recently been exposed to possible HIV infection. *See the back of this leaflet for further details.*

HIV:Reality

Over 80,000 people are living with HIV in the UK and there are over 7,000 new infections every year. Over a quarter of people living with HIV in the UK don't know they are infected. People living with HIV still face discrimination, but treatment is improving and life expectancy is increasing.

The experiences of people living with HIV are not often shared and knowledge about HIV is declining. Reading real stories about HIV in the UK and understanding the facts will help break down prejudice and inform us about how to protect ourselves and others to stop the spread of HIV.

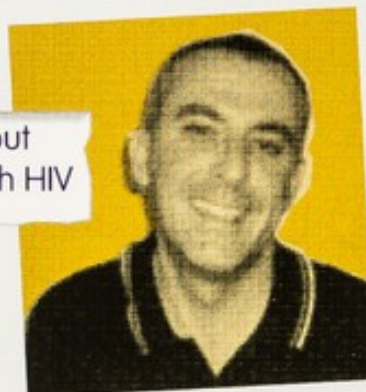
Living with HIV is not what you'd expect



I've been living with HIV for 15 years; the side-effects still get me down.

Everyone's experience is different but treatment today means people with HIV can live a long life.

I'm living well with HIV; I take one pill a day, work and keep fit.



There is no cure for HIV but there is treatment. If started early and taken correctly people diagnosed with HIV today can expect a near normal life expectancy. People diagnosed soon after infection may not need to start treatment straight away. Treatment options have improved a lot over recent years - complex regimes with many side-effects are being replaced with just one or two pills once or twice a day. This means that someone who has been living with HIV for some time, and gone through many different treatment options, will have a different experience to someone who is diagnosed now.

Some people suffer side-effects including nausea, diarrhoea and prolonged headaches. In some cases treatment causes changes in body shape, depression and mental health issues. Other people find they are able to lead a very healthy life with HIV and may not suffer the same side-effects.

Other people's attitudes can be the biggest problem



*I can work with HIV
no problem, the hard part
was telling my boss.*

A third of people living with HIV
have faced discrimination.

When people share their stories about HIV, stigma and discrimination is often part of the experience. People not getting a job or being treated differently at work because they are living with HIV, being rejected by family or friends, suffering verbal abuse or assault, and children being turned away from schools are just some of the stories of discrimination in the UK today.

HIV prejudice is often the result of ignorance about how HIV is passed on and unfounded fear of becoming infected. Encouraging those around us to talk about HIV and find out the facts can help overcome this.

There are so many myths out there

*My wife has HIV -
we can still have a
healthy baby*

People with HIV can still have
relationships and families.



Many people still remember stories of HIV and AIDS from the 1980s and 90s. But treatments have come a long way, and although there isn't a cure for HIV, it is not a death sentence. People with HIV can live long, healthy and productive lives.

Often people with HIV will not appear ill. In fact, you generally cannot tell if someone is living with HIV.

If someone with HIV decides to have a child, there are many options available to them to make sure they have a healthy baby.

Newspapers often report about people being afraid of getting HIV from a fight, being spat at, or from treading on a discarded needle, but in fact no one has ever got HIV this way.

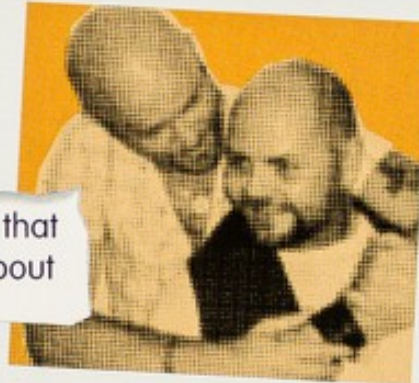
It doesn't take months to find out if you are infected with HIV. A test can be taken within weeks of possible exposure to the virus, and the result can be available in as little as 15 minutes.

Some people worry about working, socialising or going to school with someone with HIV, but HIV is not passed on through day-to-day contact.

Telling people about HIV can be difficult

How do I tell him I have HIV?

There are lots of organisations that can support you with advice about disclosing your status.



People living with HIV sometimes do not tell others about their status for fear they will be rejected, or lose their job or home. There is usually no need to tell employers, neighbours or teachers as there is no risk of transmitting HIV through day-to-day contact. It can also be difficult to tell friends, family and (potential) partners if you are HIV positive and this can make people living with HIV feel isolated.

Many people who have told others say they had a positive experience. **If someone wants to disclose their status and is worried, they can get support from the National Sexual Health Helpline on 0800 567 123.**

If someone tells you they have HIV be respectful, treat the information in confidence and do not tell others without their permission.

Everyone should consider if they need an HIV test



I try to be safe but how often should I get an HIV test?

Every gay man should get an HIV test at least once a year.

If you think you have put yourself at risk of infection it is important to take an HIV test as soon as possible. Gay men should have an HIV test at least once a year. Black African men and women should also make sure they are regularly tested.

Many people will experience symptoms of HIV in the first few weeks after infection. These are normally flu-like symptoms that pass after a few weeks, so they can easily be missed. The symptoms – a fever, a rash and a sore throat all occurring together – are actually unusual. If you've put yourself at risk recently these symptoms are clear warning signs you should have an HIV test.

Knowing your HIV status is very important for protecting yourself and your partner. An HIV test is simple, and testing technologies are improving all the time, meaning that you can find out the result earlier. Rapid testing clinics can offer results in 15 minutes. You can ask for a free and confidential test at your local sexual health clinic, which you can locate at www.fpa.org.uk/Findaclinic

People should be aware of the risks

*We're straight and single,
should we be worried
about HIV?*



HIV can affect anybody. However, in the UK most people living with HIV are gay or bisexual men and black African men and women.

Anyone who is sexually active or shares needles is at risk of getting or passing on HIV. Over 7,000 people are diagnosed with HIV in the UK every year. Using condoms when having sex and getting tested if you are worried you have put yourself at risk is important advice for everyone.

In the UK some communities have higher rates of infection, in particular gay and bisexual men and black African men and women.

Although gay men are most affected in the UK, more heterosexual people than gay men were diagnosed with HIV last year, most of whom were infected abroad. On average most people diagnosed are in their 30s, but more than one in 10 diagnoses are among young people (aged 16-24); and five per cent of people diagnosed are over 55. There are also over 1,000 children living with HIV in the UK.

How to Respect & Protect

RESPECT
PROTECT



- ▶ Know your HIV status: get tested if you have put yourself at risk.
- ▶ If someone tells you they are HIV positive, treat them with respect and don't tell others without their agreement.
- ▶ Talk to all new sexual partners about using condoms.
- ▶ Wear a red ribbon as a symbol of your support for everyone affected by HIV, and to raise awareness.
- ▶ Talk to your friends, family and colleagues about HIV – make sure they know the reality, not the myths.
- ▶ Check your workplace has a robust policy which ensures people living with HIV are treated fairly, and in accordance with the law.
- ▶ Check your local school has a comprehensive sex and relationship education programme and teaches young people about HIV.
- ▶ Challenge inaccurate reporting about HIV in the media. NAT's guide for journalists can be found at: www.nat.org.uk/Information-and-Resources/Media-reporting.aspx
- ▶ Support an HIV charity.
- ▶ Find out about campaigns and events that you can support at www.worldAIDSday.org
- ▶ Pass this leaflet on to other people when you have finished with it.
- ▶ Discover more facts, information and real stories about HIV in the UK at www.worldAIDSday.org

HIV: Reality

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Further information

Find out more about **HIV: Reality** including real stories about HIV in the UK at www.worldAIDSday.org

For confidential advice call the National Sexual Health Helpline on 0800 567 123

Locate your nearest sexual health clinic at www.fpa.org.uk/Findaclinic

PEP – If you are within 72 hours of possible exposure to HIV infection, a course of treatment called PEP is available from A&E departments and sexual health clinics which may prevent infection taking place. Find out more at www.tht.org.uk/pep

NAT is the UK's leading charity dedicated to transforming society's response to HIV. We provide fresh thinking, expert advice and practical resources. **We campaign for change.**

All our work is focused on achieving four strategic goals:

- ▶ Effective HIV prevention in order to halt the spread of HIV
- ▶ Early diagnosis of HIV through ethical, accessible and appropriate testing
- ▶ Equitable access to treatment, care and support for people living with HIV
- ▶ Eradication of HIV-related stigma and discrimination.

Shaping attitudes. Challenging injustice. Changing lives.

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