

## **HIV, AIDS and condoms / Durex Information Service for Sexual Health.**

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# **HIV**

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# **AIDS**

**A N D**

# **CONDOMS**



**THE FACTS**

# HIV --- AIDS AND CONDOMS

The first fact about AIDS is that AIDS is now a fact of life. We have learnt to live with the idea of AIDS but too many people still think of it as a disease which "other" people contract.

As yet we don't really understand the full implications of AIDS. Society's reaction to AIDS has varied from shock and fear to complacency. We all know AIDS exists and yet, in general, we haven't changed our sexual behaviour.

As yet there is no cure for HIV (which leads onto AIDS) so there is only one way to combat the disease. That's to prevent it from spreading.

**T H E F A C T S**





## WHAT ARE HIV/AIDS?

HIV stands for "Human Immunodeficiency Virus," a virus which has the ability to attack the immune system and make the body more vulnerable to infections. AIDS stands for "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome," which is a name to cover what happens when the body becomes more vulnerable to infection. You do not catch AIDS. Initially you catch HIV the virus which leads to AIDS. People who develop AIDS become ill from a variety of problems which they cannot fight off and from which they eventually die. Two illnesses which commonly affect AIDS patients are a type of pneumonia called pneumocystis carinii, and a form of cancer which attacks the skin called Kaposi's sarcoma.

It is possible to carry HIV without having AIDS itself. People have been known to carry the virus for up to ten years or more before developing AIDS. Some anonymous HIV testing has started on a regular basis in the UK but, as yet, nobody knows how many people have caught the virus. Because of the nature of the virus, you cannot tell if someone has caught it.



## HOW DO YOU CATCH HIV?

Because of the conflicting publicity about AIDS, people are naturally confused about how easy it is to catch the virus.

It is, in fact, very difficult to catch other than through the recognised risk behaviours. Medical opinion is that you cannot contract HIV through normal day-to-day contact with a person carrying the virus. It is safe to share cups, plates and cutlery. Food prepared under normal hygienic conditions by a person with HIV cannot carry the virus. However implements such as toothbrushes and razors which come into contact with blood and bodily secretions may not be safe.

Since the virus has been found in bodily fluids including blood, semen, vaginal secretions, urine, menstrual blood, faeces and breast milk, the virus may be contracted from a person with HIV in the following ways:

- through high risk sexual practices – unprotected vaginal or anal intercourse (homosexual and heterosexual)
- through sharing hypodermic needles and drug equipment (as intravenous drug abusers do)
- from an infected mother to her child (either from breast milk, infection through the womb or contact with maternal blood at delivery)
- through transfusion with contaminated blood or some blood products. (Note that in the UK all blood has been screened for the virus since 1985 and there is virtually no risk of contamination through receipt of donated tissue or organs. Semen donors are tested for HIV before their donation is used.)

NOTE: Although the virus has been found in saliva, medical opinion states there is no evidence of contamination through "wet kissing."

The questions we have to ask ourselves are:

- "HAVE I OR ANY OF MY PARTNERS PUT OURSELVES AT RISK?"
- HOW ABOUT MY PARTNERS' PARTNERS?
- "HOW CAN I BE SURE?"

If you are going to have sex, there is only one option – protection.



## HOW IS AIDS GOING TO AFFECT THE FUTURE?

AIDS is a worldwide problem. Early cases were found in drug abusers, blood transfusion patients and people who practised high risk sexual activities.



*But now HIV is being caught  
through conventional sex –  
between men and women.*


In the UK the virus has entered the heterosexual population and the figures show these cases to be steadily increasing. Safer sexual practices can slow the rate of spread.

*What this really means is by  
practising safer sex YOU can make  
a difference to the spread of AIDS.*



## IS THERE A CURE?

There is no cure for HIV and no vaccine to prevent people from catching the virus. Although scientists are working on the problem, we cannot expect to see a cure or vaccine for many years yet.



## HOW CAN YOU TELL IF YOU HAVE HIV?

You cannot tell by looking at someone whether they are carrying the virus and no-one can tell by looking at you.

*There is now no doubt that HIV is infecting the heterosexual population.*

If you think that you may have had sexual contact with someone who could be infected, then you should consider having an HIV test.

If you are worried, the place to go is a GU (Genito Urinary Medicine) clinic, sometimes known as a STD (sexually transmitted disease) clinic. You will be able to find one through your GP or family planning clinic or by telephoning your local hospital. Some telephone directories have numbers to ring under VD (Venereal Diseases) clinics. Testing is only performed after full counselling and with your consent.

## WHAT DOES SAFER SEX REALLY MEAN?

Sex has always been risky. Now more than ever. But as it is unrealistic to expect everyone to stop having sex, safer sex is a way of minimising the dangers.

### SAFER SEX

Vaginal sex using a condom properly. Not only does this help to prevent unwanted pregnancy, it radically reduces the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases such as herpes, syphilis, gonorrhoea, thrush, chlamydia and genital warts as well as HIV. It can also help to prevent cervical cancer.

Mutual masturbation is safe provided neither partner has cuts or sores on their hands.

Touching, stroking and kissing. Sex doesn't have to be solely about penetration and provided neither partner has cuts or sores

on hands or mouth, this is safe and can be satisfying.

It is safe for a man to climax over his partner's body provided the semen does not come into contact with any body openings, open cuts, sores or rashes.

Oral sex with a condom. It is possible to catch the virus through unprotected oral sex as the virus could enter the body through sores or cuts in the mouth. By using a condom carefully, you are providing a level of protection against the virus. Use a dry or flavoured condom.

### UNSAFE SEX

Anal intercourse should be avoided. It is very risky, even with a condom. Bear in mind that condoms were only designed for vaginal sex.

Sex without a condom – vaginal, anal or oral. There will be no barrier protection to prevent the virus from entering the blood system through cuts or broken skin.






## CAN A CONDOM REALLY PREVENT AIDS?

It is medically proven that condoms can help to prevent sexually transmitted diseases. These include herpes, gonorrhoea, syphilis, chlamydia, genital warts and HIV. Condoms also help to protect against cervical cancer and re-infection of thrush.

HIV cannot pass through the intact rubber film. It is virtually impossible to catch the virus if the intact condom is used correctly. This means:

- using a good quality condom with a spermicide (which itself can kill the virus)
- making sure the condom remains intact on the penis
- making sure that no semen is spilt during withdrawal
- remembering that oil based lubricants and ointments can damage condoms.

Condoms are a reliable barrier, preventing disease from being passed on. However, to ensure maximum protection they must be used properly. Failure rates of condoms are frequently due to user problems. It is therefore of utmost importance to use a good quality condom and to use it correctly.



## HOW DO YOU RECOGNISE A GOOD QUALITY CONDOM?

British Standard BS 3704: 1989 regulates the quality of condoms. It is very important to use a well-known brand which carries the kitemark.

For your reassurance Durex carries out further tests such as electronic testing and air inflation tests.



## HOW CAN YOU BE SURE YOU ARE USING A CONDOM CORRECTLY?

1 Use a condom every time you have sex. (Check the expiry date on the packet).



2 Open the foil carefully so there is no danger of tearing the condom inside. Remove it carefully by pushing from the unopened end.



3 Put on the condom as soon as the penis is hard and erect but before any sexual contact, as sperm may be released before ejaculation. Squeeze the closed end of the condom to expel surplus air and make sure the condom will unroll the right way.



4 Still squeezing the closed end between thumb and forefinger, unroll gently down the full length of the penis. Make sure the condom is not damaged by sharp fingernails or rings.



5 After sex, slowly withdraw the penis before it goes soft, holding the condom firmly in place at the base of the penis.



6 Ease it off the penis taking care not to spill any semen and keep both penis and condom clear of your partner.



7 Wrap the condom in a tissue and dispose of it hygienically. (not down the toilet).

## WHERE CAN YOU BUY CONDOMS?

Condoms have come out of the closet.

They are available from more places now than they ever have been, such as:

- ▶ Distributed free at family planning clinics
- ▶ Drugstores and Chemists
- ▶ Supermarkets
- ▶ Mail order
- ▶ Petrol stations
- ▶ Vending machines in pubs, restaurants and hotels



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