

**Information for women about HIV infection / written by positive women from the Body Positive women's group.**

**Contributors**

Body Positive (London, England)

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# Information for Women

about HIV Infection



*Written by Positive Women  
from the Body Positive Women's Group*

*The following information and advice is applicable to all women*

## *What is HIV?*

HIV means Human Immunodeficiency Virus. HIV positive means you have been in contact with the HI virus. It does not mean you have AIDS.

## *What is AIDS?*

AIDS means Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. The immune system becomes weakened and the body's ability to fight infections is impaired. It can take years for this condition to arise, perhaps not at all.

## *How is HIV transmitted?*

For a person to become infected the virus must enter the bloodstream.

As far as we know there are three ways in which the virus can be transmitted from person to person:

- In semen or vaginal fluids during unprotected penetrative sexual intercourse, both vaginal and anal.
- In blood, for example by sharing needles or syringes with an infected person.
- In some instances from a mother to her unborn child.  
As yet there is no conclusive evidence of transmission via breastmilk to a baby.

The virus cannot be transmitted in tears, saliva, sweat or through usual social contact.

## *How do you care for yourself?*

### *Minimise Stress*

Undue stress regarding practical matters such as your job or lack of one, housing, family conflict, children and so on, will have a direct bearing on your well-being and the efficiency of your immune system. **The emotional stresses from within yourself can also be debilitating.**

Be kind to yourself - give yourself time and space - have treats - do the things you enjoy most.

This is a new situation for you and learning to accept and come to terms with it will take time. Try to accept the love and support of other women, whether they are HIV positive or untested.

You can put extra stresses on yourself by changing eating habits, giving up smoking and so on. Do these things only if you want to, and when you feel ready.

*For women, preventing the spread of HIV infection is about valuing yourself, with the right to make choices about what you will & will not do with your body, with the freedom to communicate this effectively to potential partners and relevant others.*



## *How can you protect yourself and others?*

### *Safer Sex*

The correct use of condoms, with nonoxynol 9, during vaginal or anal sex is essential. There are instructions on how to use them in every packet. Sex toys should not be shared, and any practice which draws blood is not recommended. Oral sex is unsafe if there are cuts or sores in or around the mouth.

For further information contact any of the AIDS Helplines.

### *Drug Use*

Needles and syringes should be for your own use. Please don't share. At the end of this leaflet there are phone numbers of drug agencies and helplines.

### *Basic hygiene*

Personal toiletries should be kept for your own use, particularly toothbrushes and razors, as a protection from minor infections rather than HIV transmission. Tampons and sanitary towels can be disposed of in the usual way, either flushed or wrapped. Washing up and laundry is done, as always, in hot water and detergent.

*Food preparation and hygiene is the same whether you are HIV positive or untested.*

### *Women with Children*

Many women worry about the risk of infection to their children, and people with whom they live. You cannot infect others by holding and touching them. Right now you probably need to have plenty of physical contact with them, so don't worry about it. In case of minor accidents, cover any cuts with plaster. Generally observe your normal household cleaning routine, making sure you use a bleach solution.

*If you have just found out that you are HIV positive, however prepared you may think you are, you may be feeling very alone and in need of support.*

*Whatever your knowledge and experience about HIV infection, this leaflet suggests ways in which you can care for yourself and how others can help you to do this.*

## *What do you do now?*

*Although you may feel alienated from others it is important to try not to isolate yourself from those around you. You now need all the love, support and help you can get.*



## *Sharing and talking*

*Your first impulse may be to tell people around you but think carefully about who you really want to tell. Initially you may find it easier to speak to someone on a Helpline where confidentiality, support and time for you to talk can be guaranteed.*

*If you would like to telephone another woman with HIV infection, please call the Body Positive Office on 071-835 1045 between 10am and 5pm to arrange this.*

*The Body Positive Helpline is open daily from 7pm - 10pm  
on 071-373 9124.*

# Contacts for Women

## NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS:

BODY POSITIVE  
51B Philbeach Gardens, London SW5 9EB  
Tel: 071-835 1045

POSITIVELY WOMEN  
5 Sebastian Street, London EC1V 0HE  
Tel: 071-490 5515

TERRENCE HIGGINS TRUST  
52-54 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8JU  
Tel: 071-831 0330

NATIONAL AIDS HELPLINE  
Tel: 0800 567123

## DRUGS:

SCODA (Standing Conference on Drug Abuse)  
1-4 Hatton Place, London EC1  
Tel: 071-430 2341

ISDD (Institute for the study of Drug Dependence)  
Extensive library service. Address as SCODA.  
Tel: 071-430 1991

MAINLINERS. PO Box 125, London SW9 8EF  
Tel: 071-274 4000 x 315 (Office hours Mon-Fri)  
Helpline: 071 737 3141 (During office hours)

## LEGAL:

IMMUNITY  
260a Kilburn Lane, London W10 4BA  
Tel: 081-968 8909

## DENTISTS:

If you have difficulty arranging dental care, contact the National AIDS Helpline, your local Helpline or your GP to see if there is a dentist listed near you.

Two clinics in London which accept self-referrals from people who are HIV positive are:

NHS Special Needs Dental Clinic  
40 Alderney Street, London SW1 4EU  
Tel: 081-746 8851/2

Clinic 5, University College Dental Clinic  
Mortimer Street, London WC1 6AU  
Tel: 071-387 9300

## SPECIAL CLINICS:

See 'phone book under Venereal Diseases, or STD (Sexually Transmitted Diseases) or GUM (Genito-Urinary Medicine). Also, G.P.'s have lists of local HIV units.

## HAEMOPHILIACS:

HAEMOPHILIA SOCIETY  
Tel: 071-928 2020

## LESBIANS:

LONDON LESBIAN & GAY  
SWITCHBOARD  
Tel: 071-837 7324

LONDON LESBIAN LINE  
Tel: 071-251 6911  
(M, F, 2-10pm; T, W, T, 7-10pm)

## DAY CENTRES:

BODY POSITIVE  
51B Philbeach Gardens, London SW5 9EB  
Tel: 071-835 1045

THE LANDMARK  
47 Tulse Hill, London SW2 2TN  
Tel: 081-671 7611/2

LONDON LIGHTHOUSE  
111-117 Lancaster Road, London W11 1QT  
Tel: 071-729 1200

## RESPIRE CARE:

MILDMAY MISSION HOSPITAL  
Hackney Road, London E2 7NA  
Tel: 071-739 2331  
All enquiries are welcome.

LONDON LIGHTHOUSE  
111-117 Lancaster Road, London W11 1QT  
Tel: 071-792 1200

## OTHERS:

CLASH (Central London Action on Street Health)  
Tel: 071-734 1794

ENGLISH COLLECTIVE OF PROSTITUTES  
Tel: 071-837 7509

NURSES SUPPORT GROUP  
Tel: 071-708 5605

WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS  
Tel: 071-251 6580

WOMEN'S THERAPY CENTRE  
Tel: 071-263 6200