

Women and AIDS : plain speaking about AIDS and how it affects women, written for women by the experts - women. 3, HIV and pregnancy and children / Positively Women and Immunity.

Contributors

Positively Women (Organization)
Immunity (Charity)

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Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

POSITIVELY WOMEN

A N D

immunity

W*omen*

A N D

AIDS

*Plain speaking
about AIDS and
how it affects
women written for
women by the
experts – women*

**3. HIV and
Pregnancy and
Children**

Your child and your rights

If you or your child are antibody positive, you shouldn't have to worry that the child will be taken into care by the council's social services department.

Social workers have a clearly defined brief. They're meant to give support to parents and children **AT HOME**. Guidelines say your child can not be taken away and put into care simply because the parents or the child have HIV infection.

If you have a home address in London and have any problems over housing, benefits, legal rights, call Immunity's Legal Centre, which offers specialist professional advice about problems caused by HIV infection and AIDS.

HIV infection and AIDS are becoming a problem when children are abused sexually and when women are raped. If your child has been sexually abused or if you've been raped don't agree to an HIV test without getting fully informed about the test and before you're given proper counselling. If your test turns out to be positive, you should get counselling at the clinic, then contact Positively Women.

PREGNANCY

If you're antibody positive to HIV, should you get pregnant? Opinions differ, but the facts as we have them are:

- All babies born to HIV antibody positive mothers are born with their mother's positive maternal antibodies.
- After six to 18 months the maternal antibodies clear and it seems that up to 75–80 percent of babies will be virus free. Obviously, that means that 20–25 percent of babies will have HIV infection. And, of them, about 50 percent will go on to develop AIDS.
- The most common way of a baby becoming infected with HIV is in the womb. There is still not enough information on transmission of virus during birth or by breast feeding.

A lot of doctors advise women who are antibody positive to HIV to have a termination. Armed with the facts above, a woman must be left to make up her own mind. If she decides to go ahead with the pregnancy, she should be given all the support she deserves. If you're in this situation we advise you to call Positively Women straight away.

If you're already pregnant, make sure your antenatal clinic doesn't test your blood for HIV antibodies without your fully informed consent. When they're taking your blood for the usual tests, ask what tests are going to be done. If you consent to an HIV antibody test, make sure you get full counselling before it and when you get the result – should it be positive. And if you do get a positive result, call Positively Women at once.

If you decide to go ahead with a termination, don't feel guilty about it. Get good counselling.

If you – or your partner – are HIV antibody positive and you're thinking seriously about having a baby, there are obvious risks:

- If you're negative and your partner's positive, there's the risk of your getting infected. Maybe you should think about artificial insemination by a donor. Use an agency like the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, which screens all donors for HIV. Research is going on into removing the virus from the semen of an infected man. Until that's available, it's advisable not to get pregnant by an infected man.
- If you're positive and your partner is negative, you run the risk of infecting him. Having said that, if you find you're pregnant and you're well research seems to indicate that pregnancy will not affect your health. If you're unwell – or injecting drugs – pregnancy could lead to illnesses associated with AIDS. And your baby could be at greater risk of infection.

BIRTH

If you have HIV infection, it is not likely that you will pass the virus on to your baby during birth.

So your baby can be delivered in the same way as anyone else's. During the birth, hospital staff may have to take more precautions than usual to avoid infection – although all women should be treated as if they were positive, rather than just singling out those who have HIV infection.

CHILDREN WHO ARE ANTIBODY POSITIVE

Like adults, children can be infected and remain completely well. It is almost impossible to generalise about HIV infections makes itself noticed or how it develops in children.

In the early stages, children may suffer from ordinary childhood conditions – such as diarrhoea, running nose, sore throat or ears, skin rashes, kidney problems and lung disorders. Other possible difficulties include slow development, lack of coordination and seizures. All of these can be early symptoms of HIV infection.

More severe symptoms of HIV infection can be serious lung problems – which may need long-term treatment with oxygen – and cancers – such as lymphoma of the central nervous system.

If your child is antibody positive to HIV and shows any of the symptoms we have listed here, see your doctor. The condition could be a minor childhood ailment. But if it is HIV-related, prompt treatment could avoid problems in the future.

Ask your doctor's advice about vaccinations – because many of them contain live virus. If your child has any symptoms which are associated with HIV, he or she should not be given measles, mumps, rubella or oral polio vaccinations. Your doctor will tell you about other ways of immunisation.

CHILDREN WHO ARE ANTIBODY NEGATIVE

Many HIV antibody positive women may find it difficult to have a loving relationship with their children who are antibody negative. They don't need to worry. It's impossible to infect a child through normal loving and affectionate behaviour.

You may find yourself becoming a bit neurotic over this. If you do, call Positively Women. More often than not we can help, as some of the women who come to our groups have experienced this themselves.

But make sure you carry out standard hygienic practices – like not sharing toothbrushes or razors, covering any open sores, cuts or grazes with a plaster, mopping up any spilt blood yourself, using bleach in the water, washing any clothes with blood on them in the hot cycle of a washing machine.

Some experts say that if you have HIV infection and your child has been given a polio vaccination by mouth, he or she could excrete live polio virus, which could be transmitted to you. Ask your doctor for advice.

LIVING IN THE COMMUNITY

If, for some reason, you decide to tell your neighbours about your – or your child's – having HIV infection, think about it carefully before you go ahead.

Remember most people are very ill-informed. If you feel you have to tell the neighbours, gauge their reaction by talking about HIV infection in a general sense. If they are obviously ignorant about the subject, slowly try to educate them yourself. Once you have done all this you may decide to go ahead and tell them about your – or your child's – antibody status.

Remember you'll want to keep your life as stress free as possible. If telling them is going to cause you any aggravation, don't say a word. But, if you have to tell them, get someone who knows about HIV to be present to support you.

If it's you who's got HIV infection, think about what happens to your child if you fall ill. The obvious thing to do is to arrange support through your immediate family or close friends. For your own peace of mind make sure you've made a will, saying exactly who's going to care for your child. If you don't have any family or friends you can fully rely on, see the bit about foster parents further down this page.

If it's your child who's got HIV infection, it's important to allow them to play freely with other children in the community.

There are no known cases of children infecting each other through everyday activities.

Most local authorities have very clear policies on what help and support that parents or children who have HIV infection need. If coping at home is difficult, ask your local authority for a home help.

If you can't take care of your own child, the local authority should ensure that any foster parents are fully briefed on the care and support a child who has HIV infection needs.

Schools

Children who have HIV infection should attend school freely. Parents whose children are antibody positive to HIV need not tell the school authorities, although you may find it preferable to inform the head teacher, to make sure your child gets full support. But ask the head to give you an assurance the school's staff won't write or talk about it, as confidentiality is imperative.

There is no record of HIV being transmitted at school – if there were, thousands of children would be infected. Gently persuade your child not to go in for rituals like becoming 'blood brothers' or 'blood sisters'. The risk is obvious.

Children who have HIV infection are entitled to receive as normal an education as possible and to be allowed access to the full range of school activities – and it's not just us who say so, that is a quote from the Local Authority Associations' Officer Working Group on AIDS.

Your child shouldn't be stigmatised at school – and shouldn't be hassled by the other children or their parents. Bear that in mind when you're deciding what you tell the school – and who you inform.

Child Care

Day nurseries and day care facilities should always accept a child with HIV infection. So should registered child minders. Everyone involved should have had full training from the local authority, not just in looking after children with HIV infection but also in counter-acting discrimination.

GROUPS AND SERVICES

Afro Caribbean Helpline Service: Black advisers offering specialised service and support on National AIDS Helpline, 0800 567 123 Fr 6pm-10pm. *Calls free*

AIDS and Housing Project: Write: 16-18 Strutton Ground, London SW1P 2HP

Body Positive: Mutual help and support group. Drop-in centre at 51b Philbeach Gardens, London SW5. Helpline: 01-373 9124 Daily 7pm-10pm. Write: PO Box 493, London W14 0TF

Childline: Confidential counselling for children and young adults in trouble or danger. Write: Freepost 1111, London EC4B 4BB - no stamp needed. Phone: 0800 1111 - calls free. 24 hrs

CLASH (Central London Action on Street Health): Young people's advice and support on anything to do with health. Write: c/o Soho Hospital, Soho Square, London W1. Phone: 01-734 1794 Mo-Fr, 10am-5pm. Other times answering machine

Dentists who treat people who have HIV infection: NHS Special Needs Dental Clinic, Alderney Street, London SW1. Phone: 01-630 8436 Mo, 3pm-5pm, Tu, We, 9am-noon or: advice on who to see from Mrs Satchell at City and Hackney Health Authority. Phone: 01-253 3020

Frontliners: Mutual help and support group for people who have AIDS. Write: c/o Terence Higgins Trust, BM AIDS, London WC1N 3XX. Phone: 01-831 0330

Haemophilia Society: Information, advice and support for everyone who has haemophilia - and special representation of and support for people with haemophilia and infected with HIV by using Factor 8. Write: 123 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1. Phone 01-928 2020

Immunity: HIV research and health education charity with UK's only full-time specialist legal centre for anyone with a legal or benefits problem connected with HIV infection, AIDS or an associated condition. Free legal advice and court representation on offer. Also welfare rights advice. Phone to fix an appointment. Charity and legal centre at 260A Kilburn Lane, London W10 4BA. Phone 01-968 8909. Mo-Fr 10am-5pm

The Landmark: (Open summer 1989) Day centre for people who have HIV infection and people who have AIDS. Will offer, advice, recreational facilities, meals. Plus info for other people. 47 Tulse Hill, London SW2. Phone: 01-671 7611/2

Lesbian Employment Rights: Non-AIDS specialist. Good on rights at work. Write: Room 203 Southbank House, Black Prince Road, London SE1 7SJ. Phone: 01-587 1636 Mo-Th 7pm-10pm

London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard: The original helpline Not an AIDS Specialist but helpful. Write: BM Switchboard, London WC1N 3XX. Phone: 01-837 7324. 24hrs

London Lesbian Line: Information, support and advice for women. Phone: 01-251 6911 Mo, Fr 2pm-10pm; Tu, Th 7pm-10pm

London Lighthouse: Hospice and drop-in centre. Offers counselling, health advice, support at home, breaks for carers and terminal care. Write: 111-117 Lancaster Road, London W11 1QT. Phone: 01-792 1200

Mainliners: Group for ex-drug users - and drug users who get their supplies on prescription - who have HIV infection or have AIDS or a related condition. Write: PO Box 125, London SW9 8EF. Helpline: 01-738 7333. Mo-Fr 10am-6pm

Margaret Pyke Centre: Gynaecology centre. Also does research. Free clinic gives free contraceptives - including condoms. Ring for appointment before visiting. 15 Batemans Buildings, Soho Square, London W1. 01-734 9351

Mildmay Mission: Christian-run hospice for people who have AIDS. Write: Hackney Road, London E2 7NA. Phone: 01-739 2331 **National AIDS Helplines:** Phone - free of charge - 0800 555 777 (for free leaflets) or 0800 567 123 (for confidential advice). 24 hours a day

Nurses Support Group: Runs helpline for health care workers who need advice and help on HIV problems. 01-708 5605. Mo, We, 7pm-10pm

Positively Healthy: Self-help group encourages positive approach to coping with HIV infection and AIDS. Runs life-affirming support groups and open meetings for people with HIV antibodies or AIDS. Publishes monthly magazine (send 34p SAE). Write: PO Box 71, Richmond TW9 3DJ. Phone: 01-940 5355

Positively Women: UK's sole women-only support group - meetings open only to women with positive diagnosis - and counselling (face-to-face and on the phone), advice and information. Write: 333 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8PX. Phone: 01-837 9705 Mo-Fr 10am-5pm. Support group meets fortnightly. Th 6.30pm-8.30pm

Positive Partners: Self-help support for anyone affected by HIV. Write: c/o 10 Rathbone Place, London W1. Phone: 01-249 6068

Proed Street Project: Research project also offers free, STD and general women's health medical and information service for prostitutes. Contact: c/o Proed Street Clinic, St Marys Hospital, London W2 1NY. Phone: 01-725 1549/6486 Mo-Fr, 9am-5pm. Open afternoon We 7pm-5pm. Visits by appointment Tu, 10am-5pm; We, 1pm-5pm

Rape Crisis Centre: Physical protection and emotional support. Write: PO Box 69, London WC1. Phone: 01-837 1600. 24hrs

SCODA (Standing Conference on Drug Abuse): Information officer keeps up-to-date list of needle exchange schemes. Write: 1-4 Hatton Place, London EC1. Phone: 01-430 2341/3

Terence Higgins Trust: Information and counselling about HIV infection and AIDS plus support groups and trained volunteers to help people with HIV infection and people who have AIDS. Write: BM AIDS, London WC1N 3XX. Phone: 01-831 0330 (Admin only) Helpline: 01-242 1010 Daily, 3pm-10pm

Women's Reproductive Rights Information Centre: Not an AIDS specialist - helpful. Advice on all health issues affecting women, including HIV infection and AIDS. Write: 52-54 Featherstone Street, London WC1. Phone: 01-351 6332

POSITIVELY WOMEN

Is an organisation run by women for women with HIV infection, AIDS - or any of the conditions associated with it. We offer the following services: support group, open only to women who have HIV infection, AIDS, or an associated condition, telephone and one-to-one counselling and consultancy services. Write to us at 333 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8PX or phone us on 01-837 9705

WHAT'S AIDS?

AIDS is short for the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. If you have AIDS your body's defence system is severely weakened. That leaves the body vulnerable to serious infections, which can kill you. That condition is called AIDS. It develops in you. HIV is often blamed for causing AIDS.

SO WHAT'S HIV?

HIV stands for the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. The virus was discovered in 1983. Since then it's been called LAV and HTLV-III, but since 1986 its proper name has been HIV. It may cause AIDS to develop in you. To get infected you have to let someone's body fluids – blood, semen, vaginal fluids and, possibly, breast milk – get into your blood stream. There are no known cases of infection through tears and saliva. HIV isn't like most viruses because, when you're infected it lives inside blood cells which are part of your body's defence system. As the cells divide and multiply, so does the virus.

HOW DOES IT SPREAD?

It is very difficult to get infected with HIV. You can put yourself of risk of getting infected:

- By having sex with someone who has HIV infection. You can cut the risk of infection by making sure he wears a condom – and remember, the more partners you have penetrative sex with, the greater you risk of coming into contact with the virus. Anal penetration is far riskier than vaginal penetrative sex.
- By sharing needles or syringes with someone who's infected with the virus.
- By sharing sex toys, whether you're straight or lesbian.

The virus can't be transmitted by social contact – by kissing, cuddling, shaking hands, sharing cups, towels, using toilets or by any close contact that doesn't involve the exchange of body fluids.

immunity

260A KILBURN LANE, LONDON W10 4BA TELEPHONE 01-968 8909

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