

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.

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Updated
SECOND EDITION

POSITIVELY WOMEN

A N D

immunity

Women

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 mustn't worry that the child will be taken into care by the council's social services department.

Social workers have a clearly defined brief. And that's to give support to parents and children AT HOME. Your child can not be taken away and put into care simply because the parents or the child have HIV infection.

If you have any problems over housing, benefits or legal rights, call Immunity's Legal Centre, which offers free 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 for a baby to become infected with HIV is in the womb. There is still not enough information on breast feeding to be certain.

A lot of doctors advise women who are antibody positive to HIV to have a termination. Armed with the facts given 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 the test and after the result. If your test comes back positive, 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 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. Your baby could be at greater risk of infection. Think about artificial insemination by a donor, this would really be the best option and not put your partner at any risk.

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 on how HIV infection 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.

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 and 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 that you, or your child, have HIV infection, think about it carefully before you go ahead.

A lot of people are still 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.

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. If you have to tell them, get someone who knows about HIV to be present to support you.

If it's you who has 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.

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 counteracting discrimination.

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. 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.

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 counteracting discrimination.

GROUPS AND SERVICES

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

Body Positive: Body Positive London runs a mutual help and support group. Drop-in centre at 51b Philbeach Gardens, London SW5. Mo and Fr 11am-9pm, Tu-Th 11am-5pm. Offers meals, free massage, advice sessions – including legal advice by Immunity's Legal Centre, 6pm-8pm. For addresses and phone numbers of other BP groups phone the National Aids Helpline (0800 567 123) or contact Body Positive, London. Write or drop in: 51b Philbeach Gardens, London SW5 9EB. Helpline 071-373 9124 Daily, 7pm-10pm

Body Positive Women's Core Group: National. Meets monthly at Body Positive Centre to provide mutual support and plan women's response to HIV infection and AIDS. For info and membership details write: 51b Philbeach Gardens, London SW5 9EB. Phone: 071-835 1045

Childline: Confidential counselling for children and young adults in trouble or danger. Write: Freepost 1111, London EC4B 4BB. 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: 071-734 1794 Mo-Fr 10am-5pm. Other times answering machine

Dentists who treat people who have HIV infection and people who have AIDS: NHS Special Needs Clinic, Alderney Street, London SW1. Mo, 3pm-5pm, Tu, We, 9am-noon Phone: 071-630 8436 or: ask Mrs Satchell at City and Hackney Health Authority. Phone: 071-253 3020.

Frontliners: Mutual help and support group for people who have AIDS. Write: c/o Terrence Higgins Trust, 52-54 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8JU. Phone: 071-831 0330

Haemophilia Society: Information, advice and support for everyone who has haemophilia – and special representation of people infected with HIV through using Factor 8. Write: 123 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1. Phone 071-928 2020

Immunity's Legal Centre: Free full-time specialist legal centre – run by HIV research and health education charity – for anyone with legal problems connected with HIV infection, AIDS or a condition connected with HIV infection or AIDS. Will-making, advice and court and industrial tribunal representation on offer. Also welfare rights advice. Centre's staff can visit. Phone to fix an appointment before visiting. Advice sessions at Body Positive Centre, The Landmark and London Lighthouse – see those entries for details. For Immunity, Immunity Publications and legal centre write: 260A Kilburn Lane, London W10 4BA. Phone 081-968 8909. Mo-Fr 10am-5pm

The Landmark: Day centre for people who have HIV infection and people who have AIDS. Offers meals, recreational facilities. Mo and Th 10am-9pm, Tu and Fr 10am-5pm, We 10am-7pm. – women-only evening – We, 7pm-9pm – and advice sessions – including legal advice from Immunity's Legal Centre. We, 5pm-7pm. Plus info for other people. Write or drop in: 47a Tulse Hill, London SW2 Phone: 081-671 7611

Lesbian Employment Rights: Non-AIDS specialist. Good on rights at work. Write: Room 203 Southbank House, Black Prince Road, London SE1 7SJ. Phone: 071-587 1636 Mo-Th 7pm-10pm

London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard: The original helpline. Not an AIDS Specialist – but clued up and helpful. Write: BM Switchboard, London WC1N 3XX. Phone: 071-837 7324. 24hrs

London Lesbian Line: Information, support and advice for women. Phone: 071-251 6911 Tu-Th 7pm-10pm

London Lighthouse: Hospice and drop-in centre. Offers counselling, health advice, support at home, breaks for carers, terminal care and advice sessions – including legal advice from Immunity's Legal Centre and North Kensington Law Centre. Thur 5pm-7pm. Write: 111-117 Lancaster Road, London W11 1QT. Phone: 071-792 1200

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. 071-734 9351

Mildmay Mission Hospital: Convalescence, respite and terminal care. Plus day care and 24-hour call-out home care service, covering City and East London. Has mother and baby rooms. Frontliners drop-in office. Write: Hackney Road, London E2 7NA. Phone: 071-729 2331

National AIDS Helplines: Phone – free of charge – for free leaflets on HIV infection and AIDS. 0800 555 777. For confidential advice: 0800 567 123. 24 hours

Nurses Support Group: Runs helpline for nursing staff needing advice and help with HIV and AIDS problems. Phone: 071-708 5605. Mo and Wed 7pm-10pm

Positively Women: Advice and support for and from women who have HIV infection, AIDS or a condition connected with HIV infection and AIDS. Meets in central London. Write: 5 Sebastian Street, London EC1V 0HE. Phone: 071-490 5515.

Positive Partners: Self-help support for anyone affected by HIV. Write: c/o 10 Rathbone Place, London W1. Phone: 071-249 6068

Præd Street Project: Research project also offers free, STD and general women's health service for prostitutes. Contact: c/o Jafferries Wing, St Mary's Hospital, London W2 1NY. Phone: 071-725 1549/6486 Mo-Fr 9am-5pm. Open afternoon We 1pm-5pm. Visits by appointment 10am-5pm, We 1pm-5pm

Rape Crisis Centre: Physical protection and emotional support. Write: PO Box 69, London WC1. Phone: 071-837 1600. 24hrs

Release: Advice and information on drug-related problems – including legal problems. Write 169 Commercial Street, London E1 6BW. Phone: 071-377 5905. Mo-Fr, 10am-6pm or (emergencies only) 071-603 8654

Standing Conference on Drug Abuse (SCODA): Information officer keeps up-to-date list of syringe exchanges. Write: 1-4 Haffon Place, London EC1N 8RU. Phone: 071-430 2341/3

Terrence Higgins Trust: Information about and counselling over HIV infection and AIDS. Plus support groups and trained volunteers to help people with HIV infection and people who have AIDS. Write: 52-54 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1N 8JU. Phone: 071-831 0330 (Admin only) Helpline: 071-242 1010 Daily, 3pm-10pm

Women's Health and Reproductive Rights Information Centre: Not an AIDS specialist – but helpful. Advice on all health issues affecting women, including HIV infection and AIDS. Write: 52-54 Featherstone Street, London WC1Y 6RT. Mo, We, Fr 11am-5pm.

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 5 Sebastian Street, London EC1V 0HE or phone us on 071-490 5515

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.

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 official 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. Many scientists assume that anyone with HIV infection is at risk of developing AIDS

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

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