



August 2011

# HIV/AIDS

## What is HIV/AIDS?

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is the virus that causes Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS)

The virus attacks the body's immune system, which is your defence against infections.

A person with HIV can stay healthy for many years. AIDS is the last stage of HIV infection. People with HIV may get certain infections such as an unusual and serious pneumonia, or certain types of cancers.

## Testing for HIV

About half of people infected with HIV do not experience any symptoms following infection.

Others may experience flu-like symptoms two to four weeks after being infected. They may have a fever, headache, sore muscles and joints, stomach ache, swollen lymph glands, or a skin rash for one or two weeks. However, these symptoms tend to be overlooked, as they can occur with many minor illnesses.

A simple blood test can tell you if are infected with HIV. It is called the HIV antibody test. A positive test result means that you have been infected with HIV and that you can spread it to others. A negative result means that no antibodies to HIV were found in your blood at the time of testing.

You can visit a sexual health clinic or your doctor to have the blood test. Early testing can lead to treatment that is more effective. Make sure you speak to a counsellor both before and after you have the test. Test results are confidential. You should also know that:

- it can take up to 12 weeks after exposure to HIV for your immune system to make antibodies to HIV
- you may be asked to wait at least 12 weeks after a possible HIV exposure to be tested. This is to make sure your results will be accurate
- if you have been infected with HIV, you can infect others, even before you have a positive blood test. Follow the steps outlined below in 'Protection and prevention' to avoid infecting others

## How HIV spreads

HIV is not spread by everyday social contact. You cannot get HIV from touching, hugging, shaking hands, telephones, toilet seats, swimming pools, whirlpools or sharing eating utensils with someone who is infected.

Pets and insects cannot spread HIV.

Some people worry that they can get HIV by donating blood, but this is not true. In Canada, a new, clean needle is used every time.

**For further information, please call:  
York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653  
TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit [www.york.ca](http://www.york.ca)**

Donated blood is always checked for HIV in Canada so the risk of getting it from a blood transfusion is very low.

## Treating HIV

There is no cure for HIV or AIDS at this time. The virus remains in the body for life. There are drugs that can slow the progress of HIV and can help those infected to live full and active lives. There are also drugs available to treat the infections and cancers associated with AIDS.

## Preventing HIV

To protect yourself and prevent the spread of HIV:

- treat all blood and body fluids as potentially infectious, especially if you work in a job where you are exposed to blood or blood products. You cannot tell who has HIV by looking at the person
- disinfect any surface that has been in contact with blood or body fluids with chlorine bleach (one part bleach to nine parts water, left on for ten minutes)
- speak openly with sexual partners about safer sex and HIV. Use a latex condom with each oral, anal or vaginal sexual encounter. Those with latex allergies should use polyurethane condoms
- do not share needles, including those used for tattooing, piercing, acupuncture and electrolysis
- if you are a pregnant or planning a pregnancy, talk to you doctor about getting tested for HIV. If you have HIV, treatment can decrease the chance that your baby will become infected. HIV infected women should not breast-feed their babies

**HIV/AIDS is a reportable disease. York Region Community and Health Services must be notified of positive HIV tests so appropriate case and contact follow up can be done.**

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