

HIV/AIDS

What is Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome?

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 pneumonia or some types of cancers.

Symptoms

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. Symptoms usually last less than two weeks, although they can last as long as 10 weeks. However, these symptoms tend to be overlooked as they can occur with many minor illnesses.

A simple blood test can tell you if you 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.

You can visit a York Region 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 your health care provider 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 to make sure your results are accurate.
- If you have been infected with HIV, you can infect others even before you have a positive blood test.

How is HIV transmitted?

HIV is transmitted through exposure to blood and/or body fluids from a person infected with HIV. The most common ways are through unprotected oral, anal and vaginal sex and intravenous drug use when sharing infected needles and drug equipment.

1-800-361-5653
TTY: **1-866-252-9933**



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Transmission can also occur from an infected mother to her fetus, or to her baby during delivery or breastfeeding. 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. Donated blood is always checked for HIV in Canada so the risk of getting it from a blood transfusion is very low.

If you test positive for HIV, all sexual and/or needle-sharing partners within three months prior to your last negative HIV test need to be notified so that they can be tested. If you have never been tested for HIV, all of your sexual or needle-sharing partners will need to be notified to get tested. Tell your partner(s) that having no symptoms does not mean there is no infection.

A York Region public health nurse can help you anonymously notify your partner(s). Your name and timeframe of encounter will be kept confidential.

Treatment

There is no cure for HIV or AIDS. 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.

Protection

To protect yourself and prevent the spread of HIV:

- Speak openly with sexual partners about safer sex and HIV.
- Use a latex condom from beginning to end of each oral, anal or vaginal sexual encounter. Those with latex allergies should use polyurethane condoms.
- Get tested and ask your partner(s) to be tested before you have sex.

- 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 breastfeed their babies.
- 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.
- 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).

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



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