

Fact Sheet

HIV/AIDS

WHAT IS HIV?

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), is the virus that can lead to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). Unlike some other viruses, the human body cannot get rid of HIV, which means that once you acquire HIV you'll have it for the rest of your life. Currently there is no safe or effective cure, but scientists are working hard to find one, and remain hopeful. HIV affects specific cells of the immune system, called CD4 cells, or T cells. Over time, HIV can destroy so many of these cells that the body can't fight off infections and disease. When this happens, HIV infection leads to AIDS.

HOW IS HIV TRANSMITTED?

HIV is primarily transmitted through sexual contact, as well as needle sharing and pregnant person to their newborn. There are five main bodily fluids that can transmit HIV:

- Blood
- Semen (includes pre-semen)
- Vaginal secretion
- Rectal fluid
- Breast milk

HOW CAN I TELL IF I AM INFECTED WITH HIV?

The only way to know if you are infected with HIV is to get tested. You cannot rely on symptoms to know whether you have HIV. Many people who are infected with HIV do not have any symptoms at all for 10 or more years. Some people who are infected with HIV report having flu-like symptoms (often described as "the worst flu ever") 2-4 weeks after exposure. Symptoms can include:

- Fever
- Sore throat
- Enlarged lymph nodes
- Rash

These symptoms can last anywhere from a few days to several weeks. During this time, HIV infection may not show up on an HIV test, but people who have it are highly infectious and can spread the infection to others.

WHAT CAN A PERSON DO TO PREVENT PASSING HIV?

Using latex condoms provides excellent protection against HIV during sexual intercourse. The internal condom and polyurethane (plastic) condoms are equally effective. Oral medication can be taken daily to prevent HIV known as Pre-exposure prophylaxis or PrEP and Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) can be taken 72 hours after sexual contact with someone who you suspect may be living with HIV. Sexually active individuals should get tested every six months to a year. An infected pregnant person should seek prenatal care early, to prevent passing HIV to their newborn. Also, avoid the sharing of syringes with other individuals.

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HOW TO GET TESTED FOR HIV?

To get tested for HIV, a person should go to a doctor or health clinic. HIV tests may be performed on a blood or oral fluid.

WHAT TREATMENT IS THERE FOR HIV?

With proper medical care, HIV can be controlled. Treatment for HIV is often called antiretroviral therapy or ART. It can dramatically prolong the lives of many people infected with HIV and lower their chance of infecting others. Before the introduction of ART in the mid-1990s, people with HIV could progress to AIDS in just a few years. Today, someone diagnosed with HIV and treated before the disease is far advanced can have a nearly normal life expectancy.

WHAT IS U = U?

U=U means staying undetectable means you are untransmittable. An undetectable viral load is when the amount of virus in your blood is so low that a test will not detect it. Taking treatment daily as prescribed can help you achieve an undetectable viral load. People living with HIV who maintain an undetectable viral load cannot sexually transmit to others.

RESOURCES



[Long Beach Health Department](#)



[California Department of Public Health](#)



[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)