



HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)

What is HIV?

HIV is a virus that affects the body's ability to fight off infections. It is the virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

Most people with HIV look healthy and have no symptoms for many years. Eventually, the immune system becomes badly weakened and AIDS may develop. This can lead to life threatening illnesses and death. However, in recent years, new treatments have become available which are allowing people to live much longer and healthier lives with HIV.

What are the symptoms?

Some people will not notice anything at all after becoming infected. Others may experience a short 'seroconversion' illness after about 2 to 6 weeks. This may include a rash, flu-like symptoms, tiredness, diarrhoea and feeling generally unwell. The person will recover from this and then remain well usually for many years.

How do you get HIV?

HIV is found in the sexual fluids of men and women, blood and in breast milk. You can become infected if you get any of these fluids from an infected person in your bloodstream.

There are 3 main ways of getting HIV.

- Having anal or vaginal sex without a condom with someone who has the virus
- Sharing drug injecting equipment
- A pregnant woman with HIV can pass the virus to her child during the pregnancy, at birth or by breastfeeding.

Therefore it is really important to always use condoms and lube with casual sexual partners, and any regular partners who don't know their HIV status and to not share injecting equipment with other people.

You cannot get HIV by -

kissing, shaking hands, touching, coughing, sneezing, sharing food or eating utensils, or

from toilet seats, swimming pools or by living in a house with a person with HIV.

Due to the small risk of exposure to blood, toothbrushes and razors or other personal items should not be shared within households.

How is it tested?

A blood test is done to test for antibodies to HIV. The test usually becomes positive about 4 – 6 weeks after you catch HIV. Sometimes it can take up to 3 months to show up in a blood test, so a repeat test should be done later to be certain.

The test can be done by a regular doctor or at a sexual health clinic. A doctor might request a test as a part of pregnancy care, a sexual health checkup or during another health service encounter.

Rapid tests for HIV use oral fluid or a finger prick blood sample to detect HIV. These tests provide results within 10-20 minutes. It is necessary to do a confirmatory lab test after rapid HIV testing. Rapid tests are not yet available in the NT.

It is important to know if you have HIV because earlier care and treatment will help those infected to live a healthier life. People who know they are HIV positive can take steps to protect other people as well.

What is the treatment?

Treatment for HIV involves taking a combination of medications called anti-retroviral therapy (ART) every day. People live much longer and healthier lives, with the help of these very effective medications.

These medications can greatly reduce the risk of a pregnant woman passing the infection to her baby and HIV transmission from a sexual partner to an uninfected partner.

Treatment cannot cure HIV; however there continues to be lot of research to find a cure.

Clinic 34 provides a broad range of treatment and support for people who have HIV.

Further information

**For more information contact Clinic 34 in
your region**

Alice Springs 8951 7549

Darwin 8999 2678

Katherine 8973 9049

Nhulunbuy 8987 0358

Tennant Creek 8962 4250

or <http://www.nt.gov.au/health/cdc/cdc.shtml>