



# 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.

Most people with HIV look healthy and have no symptoms for many years. Eventually, the immune system becomes badly weakened and AIDS will 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 flu-like symptoms and include tiredness, diarrhoea and feeling generally unwell. The person will recover from this and then remain well for usually 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 get infected if you get 1 of these fluids from an infected person inside 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.

It is really important to always use condoms and lube with casual sexual partners and not to share injecting equipment with others.

## You cannot get HIV by:

Kissing, shaking hands, touching, coughing, sneezing, sharing food or eating utensils, toilet seats, swimming pools or by living in a house with a person with HIV.

## What tests do you do?

A blood test is done to test for antibodies to HIV. However, if you become infected with HIV, it can take up to 3 months before antibodies show up in a blood test. Therefore, during this 3 month 'window period' it is possible for a blood test to be negative, when you really do have HIV.

You will need to wait 3 months from the time you have put yourself at risk before you can be sure that a negative test result will really mean that you are not infected.

It is important to know if you might have HIV for 2 reasons. Leading a healthy lifestyle will delay the disease getting worse and it is important to start treatment before the symptoms of AIDS begin. Also, you can make sure that you don't pass the infection on to anyone else.

## What is the treatment?

There are many medications which can treat HIV and help people to live much longer and healthier lives, but there is **no cure**. These medications can greatly reduce the risk of a pregnant woman passing the infection to her baby.

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

For more information contact Clinic 34 in your area.

Further fact sheets available at:  
<http://www.nt.gov.au/health/cdc/cdc.shtml>



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