



# HIV Fact Sheet

## What is HIV?

HIV is human immunodeficiency virus. It is a virus that can lead to acquired immune deficiency syndrome, or AIDS. HIV damages a person's body by attacking specific blood cells.

## Who gets HIV?

Anyone can get HIV.

## How is the virus spread?

HIV can be transmitted via the exchange of a variety of body fluids from infected individuals, such as blood, breast milk, semen and vaginal secretions. Individuals cannot become infected through ordinary day-to-day contact such as kissing, hugging, shaking hands, or sharing personal objects, food or water.

## What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of HIV vary depending on the stage of infection. Though people living with HIV tend to be most infectious in the first few months, many are unaware of their status until later stages. The first few weeks after initial infection, individuals may experience no symptoms or an influenza-like illness including fever, headache, rash or sore throat.

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As the infection progressively weakens the person's immune system, the individual can develop other signs and symptoms such as swollen lymph nodes, weight loss, fever, diarrhea and cough. Without treatment, they could also develop severe illnesses such as tuberculosis, cryptococcal meningitis, and cancers such as lymphomas and Kaposi's sarcoma, among others.

### **How long can an infected person spread the virus?**

Most people have a "window period" of usually 3 to 6 weeks during which antibodies to HIV are still being produced and are not yet detectable. This early period of infection represents the time of greatest infectivity, but transmission can occur during all stages of the infection.

### **How is HIV diagnosed?**

An HIV test reveals infection status by detecting the presence or absence of antibodies to HIV in the blood. If someone has had a recent possible HIV exposure (within 2 to 8 weeks), retesting should be done after 3 months to confirm test results, which enables sufficient time to pass for antibody production in infected individuals. Rarely retesting after 6 months from exposure date is warranted.

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## What is the treatment for HIV?

There is no specific treatment that can make the infection go away. HIV can be suppressed by combination antiretroviral therapy (ART) consisting of three or more antiretroviral (ARV) drugs. ART does not cure HIV infection but controls viral replication within a person's body and allows an individual's immune system to strengthen and regain the capacity to fight off infections. With ART, people living with HIV can live healthy and productive lives.

## How can infection with HIV be prevented?

- Safe Sex
  - Don't have unprotected sex with an individual you are unsure of their infection status
- Drug Use
  - Don't use injection drugs
  - If using these drugs do not share equipment:
- Needles, syringes, cookers, cotton, or rinse water
- Pregnancy
  - Mothers with HIV can transmit the infection to their infant during pregnancy, delivery, or through breastfeeding.

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- Medications taken during pregnancy can reduce the risk of passing the virus to an infant.
- If you have HIV, feed your baby formula or breast milk from a surrogate (uninfected) women
- Blood Contact
  - If assisting a bleeding person avoid getting their blood into cuts or open sores on your body

*For further information, contact the  
Oklahoma City-County Health Department  
(405) 425-4437*

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