

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HIV INFECTION AND AIDS

In the Clinic
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What is HIV infection and how is it different from AIDS?

- Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) causes a chronic, lifelong infection. HIV has a large range of symptoms, from none at all in the early stages to severe illness in the late stage when it is called the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).
- AIDS typically occurs 8–10 years after HIV infection.

How does it cause disease?

- HIV infects a key cell in the immune system, called a CD4 cell.
- Without treatment, the number of CD4 cells gradually decreases, damaging the immune system.
- When the CD4 cell count is less than 200 and the immune system is severely damaged, people with HIV can get sick from germs that do not cause illness in people with normal immune systems.

How is it spread?

- By sexual intercourse, whether you are a man or a woman.
- By contact with infected blood.
- From an infected mother to her newborn baby.

Who gets HIV infection?

- Men who have sex with men.
- Heterosexual women.
- Heterosexual men.
- People who inject drugs and share injection equipment.
- Newborns whose mothers have HIV and did not take medications for HIV during pregnancy.

How do you know if you have HIV infection?

- There are blood and saliva tests for HIV.
- The tests turn positive 2–12 weeks after infection.



How is it treated?

- A combination of 3 drugs keeps HIV from reproducing and helps restore the damaged immune system.
- The medications don't cure HIV, so they must be taken lifelong, like treatment for other chronic diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure.
- People with HIV/AIDS can live many years with treatment and can lead normal lives.

For More Information

www.acponline.org/patients_families/pdfs/health/hiv.pdf
www.acpfoundation.org/hl/e_https.htm

A patient handout on HIV/AIDS, including testing and treatment, and a HEALTH TIPS brochure on treatment for HIV/AIDS.

www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/hivaids/Pages/Default.aspx
Detailed information on HIV/AIDS from the U.S. National Institute on Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

www.aidsinfo.nih.gov/other/factsheet.aspx
Fact sheets, including "HIV and Its Treatment: What You Should Know" and "Side Effects of Anti-HIV Medications," in English and Spanish, from AIDSinfo, a project of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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