

HIV and AIDS

HIV stands for **H**uman **I**mmunodeficiency **V**irus. HIV is a retrovirus, which means that it can enter the body's own cells and become part of those cells. In time, HIV weakens the immune system in most people. This leaves you more likely to develop infection and disease than a person without HIV.

When a person has HIV, the body tries to fight the virus by making antibodies. An HIV test is performed to look for these antibodies. It can take days to weeks for the body to make antibodies. You are "HIV-positive" if antibodies are found. If you test positive for HIV, you will always test positive, since you retain those antibodies for life.

While HIV is a lifelong condition, it can be well-managed so that you can live a long and healthy life. The good news is that there are safe and effective medicines to stop HIV from progressing. This requires you to take medicine every day and see your doctor on a regular basis. There are even new medicines coming out that will only require monthly injections.

What is AIDS?

AIDS stands for **A**cquired **I**mmunodeficiency **S**yndrome. When a person has AIDS, the immune system has been harmed by HIV. AIDS is diagnosed based on the state of a person's health. It is not the same as having HIV. It can take years for AIDS to develop, and if HIV is treated right away, many people will never develop AIDS.

How is HIV spread?

HIV can occur when:

1. A person is exposed to certain body fluids of someone who has HIV.
2. The amount of HIV in a person's body fluids is enough to spread it to another person.
3. HIV gets into the bloodstream of the person who is exposed to the fluids.

Body Fluids That Carry HIV

- Blood
- Semen
- Breast milk
- Vaginal fluids

If these fluids get into your blood, they can increase your risk of getting HIV. Risk factors include:

- Sharing needles or injection supplies that contain blood.
- Anal or vaginal sex without using a barrier (i.e. condom).
- Blood or blood product transfusion that has the HIV virus.
Note: Blood products in the U.S. are the safest they have been. Blood donors are carefully screened. Donated blood goes through many tests to make sure it is safe.
- A person who has HIV when pregnant, during birth, or nursing an infant. A baby whose mother is taking medicines for HIV greatly reduces this risk.

How can I lower the risk of getting or spreading HIV?

1. Use protection during sex. This includes condoms, female condoms, and dental dams.
2. If you inject drugs, use clean needles and works. Do not share needles or works with anyone else.
3. If you are pregnant and have HIV, you can take medicine during pregnancy and birth. Bottle feed your infant with formula since the HIV virus is found in breast milk.
4. If you have HIV, one of the best ways you can prevent spreading HIV is to take an effective medicine to control the illness. If your virus is undetectable, you are unable to spread it through sexual activity. (U=U means Undetectable = Untransmittable)

Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (or PrEP) is medicine used if you are at high risk for HIV. You must take this medicine every day to lower your chances of getting HIV. When used right, PrEP lowers your risk of getting HIV from sex by more than 90%. If you inject drugs, it lowers your risk by more than 70%. When PrEP is used with protection, the risk of HIV from sex can be lowered as well.

Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP)

Post-Exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is when you take anti-retroviral medicines (ART) after you may have been exposed to HIV. This helps prevent you from getting infected. PEP is used in emergencies. It must be started within 72 hours of exposure. If you think you've been exposed to HIV, seek medical care right away and ask about PEP.

Common Myths

Myth: You can get HIV if you share toilets and shake hands.

Truth: It is safe to share public toilets and shake hands.

Myth: You can get HIV from kissing.

Truth: Kissing is safe. The level of HIV in saliva is low.

Myth: Mosquitoes can spread HIV.

Truth: HIV isn't spread by mosquitoes.

Who should get tested for HIV?

The CDC recommends a screening test for patients in all health care settings. People at high risk for HIV infection should be screened regularly. It is important to know if you have HIV so that you can be treated before your immune system is harmed.

Testing should be done for anyone who may have been exposed to HIV. If there is a chance you were exposed to HIV just before the test, your body might not have started to make antibodies. You may need repeat tests in 6 weeks, 12 weeks, and 6 months, even if the first test is negative.

Pregnant people should be tested to prevent the spread of the virus to the baby during pregnancy and birth. It is easy and safe to protect the baby from HIV by taking medicines.

Can I refuse an HIV test?

It is your choice to have an HIV test. You have a right to refuse. Health care and treatment can't be denied because you refuse to have an HIV test.

Where can I get tested for HIV?

There are anonymous HIV tests and confidential HIV tests.

An anonymous HIV test is done at a testing site. It does not use your name. The test result does not go into your medical record. Contact your local public health department for more information.

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/lh-depts/counties.htm>

A confidential HIV test is done in a doctor's office. It does record your name. This means that only certain people have access to the test result. These test results do go into your medical record.

What does it mean if the HIV test is non-reactive?

If a test is non-reactive, it means that the test has not found HIV antibodies. Most of the time, this means that you have not acquired HIV. If there is a chance you were exposed to HIV just before the test, the body might not have started making antibodies yet. In this case, a repeat test about 3 months after the first test is advised.

What does it mean if the test is reactive?

If a test is reactive, it means that the test has found HIV antibodies. This means that you have HIV disease.

What happens after a reactive or positive HIV test?

A reactive or positive test result requires follow-up with an HIV expert. The doctor will monitor the status of your immune system and the virus.

If you receive a reactive test result in the UW Health ED, Urgent Care, or in an any UW Health clinic, ask the staff to call the UW Health Linkage to Care Social Worker for immediate help.

You can also call the UW Health HIV Care and Prevention Program at **608-263-0946** and ask to speak with a social worker. They will help decide the needed follow up and provide support to you. The clinic is open Monday - Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

If a diagnosis of HIV is made, you will meet with an HIV specialist and more blood tests will be ordered to check your immune system. A social worker will be available to talk through any questions or concerns you may have. You will receive care regardless of your insurance status, ability to pay or immigration status.

It is important that if you test positive for HIV, you see a doctor who is an HIV/AIDS expert as soon as possible. There are safe and effective medicines to preserve the immune system, control the virus, and reduce the chance of spreading the virus. An HIV expert will review treatment options so the best choice can be made about your treatment.

Who can see the results of my HIV test?

State law permits a limited number of people to know if someone has a HIV infection. Positive test results are shared with public health officials. Strict laws protect confidential information on HIV.

Other Resources

UW Health HIV Care and Prevention Program

608-263-0946

<https://www.uwhealth.org/conditions/hiv>

They offer affordable, accessible and confidential medical and social services for people living with HIV regardless of insurance or ability to pay. They also offer Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) to prevent HIV.

Viventhealth (formerly ARCW)

800-359-9272

<https://viventhealth.org>

They provide HIV testing, HIV treatment, PrEP, prevention services, case management, legal services, support groups, food pantry, dental, and other services.

Public Health Madison & Dane County 608-243-0411 or 608-243-0380 (Spanish)

<http://www.publichealthmdc.com/health-services/sexual-health>

They provide confidential, free or low-cost testing for HIV, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and hepatitis C. They also offer treatment for STIs.

Wisconsin HIV Program

608-267-9003

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/aids-hiv/index.htm>

They coordinate the public health response to HIV/AIDS. They provide HIV-related information, service agencies, service providers, and more.

OraQuick® In-Home HIV Test

www.oraquick.com

This HIV test kit lets people test at home by using an oral swab and testing solution. Results can be read in 20 to 40 minutes. It is Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved and available in many major pharmacies, retailers and online.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 9/2022 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#4421.