

Aids (Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome)

What are HIV and AIDS? "HIV" stands for human immunodeficiency (ih-mew-no-d-FISH-in-c) virus. Once you are infected with this virus, you will probably be infected for life. "AIDS" stands for acquired immune deficiency (d-FISH-in-c) syndrome (SIN-drome). To get AIDS, you must be infected with HIV and have a weakened immune system. Scientists are making progress with treatments for HIV, so people with AIDS are living longer and healthier lives.

Causes: Your immune system protects your body from infection. The HIV virus weakens part of your immune system by damaging the Helper T-cells (also called CD4+ cells), a type of white blood cell (WBC). T-cells help your body fight certain kinds of infections. With AIDS, the number of T-cells is low and cannot help fight these infections. The HIV virus can also cause certain types of cancers. It is these infections and cancers that actually make people with HIV or AIDS sick.

Signs and Symptoms: There are 2 ways that doctors can diagnose AIDS. A positive HIV test and either a T-cell count less than 200, or an infection that only affects people with weakened immunity. A healthy adult's T-cell count should be more than 500. You may have HIV in your body for some time and not know it. You may have one or more of the following symptoms:

- Changes in your ability to think.
- Changes in your coordination (ko-or-di-NA-shun). Coordination is the way your muscles work together.
- Diarrhea (loose stools).
- Fevers.
- Joint pain.
- Mouth, throat, vagina, or rectal (rear end) sores.
- Night sweats.
- Skin rashes.
- Swollen glands in your neck, jaw, armpit, or groin (between your legs).
- Weight loss.

With AIDS, your body has trouble fighting off germs. You can get infected with germs that do not bother most people, often in the lungs or brain. You may also get some rare kinds of pneumonia. One of these is pneumocystis (new-mo-SIS-tis) carinii (KUH-rih-nee-i) pneumonia (new-MOAN-yuh). This is also called PCP, and is a lung infection. You may also get Kaposi's (kuh-PO-zees) sarcoma (KS), a form of cancer.

How is HIV spread from person to person? The following are ways that HIV can be spread:

- Through contact with blood and certain body fluids (sperm, vaginal fluids and breast milk).
- Having sex (especially if not using a **latex** condom) with someone who has HIV.
- Injecting drugs with used equipment.

- An HIV infected mother may spread the virus to her baby before or during birth.
- HIV may be spread from a mother to her baby through breast feeding.
- In the US, before 1985, people could be infected by HIV infected blood and blood products. Since 1985 blood is tested before being used.

How is HIV not spread? There are many false beliefs about how HIV may be spread from person to person. Following are the ways HIV is **not** spread:

- Food, or sharing plates, cups, or silverware.
- Insect bites, such as mosquitos.
- Sneezing or coughing.
- Swimming pools, or other public places.
- Toilet seats, clothes, or sheets.
- Touching the skin of a person who has HIV.

What are the infections and cancers I could get because I have AIDS?

- **Candida (KAN-di-dah):** This is a fungal infection that may occur in the mouth. It is also called "thrush". It looks like a white coating over your tongue and in your mouth.
- **Cytomegalovirus (si-to-MEG-uh-lo-vi-rus):** This is also called "CMV". It is a virus (germ) that may cause you to feel tired or to have a fever. You may also have large lymph (limf) nodes and pain in your muscles or throat. You could get a liver (hepatitis), lung (pneumonia), eye, or bowel infection from CMV. Long-term problems may be diarrhea or blindness.
- **Kaposi's (kuh-PO-zees) sarcoma (sar-KO-muh):** This is a common cancer in AIDS patients. It is also called "KS". This cancer may first show up on the legs or mouth as purplish-red sores. These sores may slowly spread. KS may also be in lymph nodes and other places inside your body. You may have pain if you have KS in the mouth. A tissue biopsy (BI-op-see) is a test done to see if you have KS.
- **Lymphoma (lim-FO-muh):** This is a type of cancer that people who have AIDS may get. It may be found in the gastrointestinal (gas-tro-in-TES-tih-null) tract (food tract), brain, or spinal cord. Lymphoma may also be found in the bone marrow, liver, or lungs. The signs of lymphoma depend on the body organ that is affected.
- **Mycobacterium (mi-ko-bak-TEER-e-um) avium complex:** This is a common AIDS infection. It is also called "MAC". Signs may include a long-term cough, coughing or spitting up blood, and abdominal (belly) pain. You may have diarrhea, fever, weight loss, night sweats, or feel tired.
- **Pneumocystis (new-mo-SIS-tis) carinii (kuh-RIN-e-i) pneumonia (new-MOAN-yuh):** This is also called "PCP". It is a lung infection, but may also infect other places in your body. You may have a fever, breathing problems, or feel tired.

- **Toxoplasmosis (tox-o-plaz-MO-sis):** This is an infection of the brain. It may cause you to feel tired or have headaches or seizures (convulsions). You may also have a high temperature and confusion. You may be numb or weak in one part of your body.
- **Tuberculosis (too-ber-q-LO-sis):** This is an infection that any person can get, but spreads faster in people with AIDS. It is also called "TB". This infection causes a long-term cough that may include coughing or spitting up blood. You may have fever, weight loss, and night sweats. Other signs depend on the site of the infection.
- People with AIDS can get all of the same infections that a person without AIDS may get. These infections become more severe and spread faster in people with HIV or AIDS.

Care:

- There is no known cure for AIDS. Treatment of HIV and AIDS focuses on decreasing the amount of HIV in the body, and preventing AIDS-related infections. Recently, scientists developed a test to check for HIV that is simple and fast. You may have the results of the test in 20 minutes, instead of waiting for a week. Scientists are also working to find a vaccine for AIDS. You may feel overwhelmed by the amount of information on HIV and AIDS being given to you. Ask for written material or write down things that you may need to remember.
- Your caregiver watches your response to treatment by checking your T-cell blood count and your viral load. You will be started on medicines, and these medicines may change often over time. The HIV virus can become resistant to certain medicines, making it harder to treat. It is very important to take all medicines correctly. Let your caregiver know if you are having any problems taking your medicine. Some medicines to treat HIV and AIDS may not work for you. Caregivers will do tests before you begin these medicines to check if they might work for you.
- Follow a healthy lifestyle to help your immune system. This may help prevent illnesses common with people who have AIDS. Eat healthy foods, exercise regularly, get enough rest, and work to prevent infection. If you smoke, you should quit. You should not drink alcohol or take "street" (illegal) drugs. Other care used to help AIDS may include meditation, massage, and spiritual healing. Ask your caregiver for more information about these other types of treatments.
- You may have other sexually transmitted disease such as herpes or syphilis. If you do, you are even more likely to give someone else the HIV virus. You may be tested for diseases such as tuberculosis (too-ber-ku-LO-sis) (a lung disease) or hepatitis (a liver disease). It is very important to treat these diseases as soon as possible.

Support:

- Being HIV-positive, or having the disease of AIDS are life-changing events for you and your family. Accepting that you are HIV-positive or have AIDS is hard. You and those close to you may feel angry, sad, or frightened. These feelings are normal. Talk to your caregivers, family, or friends about your feelings. Let them help you. Encourage those close to you to talk to your caregiver about how things are at home. Your caregiver can help your family better understand how to support a person who is HIV-positive, or has AIDS.

- You may want to join a support group. This is a group of people who also have are HIV-positive or have AIDS. Ask your caregiver for the names and numbers of support groups near you.

How can I keep from getting HIV or AIDS?

- Avoid having sex unless it is with a partner that does not have HIV or AIDS. Ask your partner if he or she is HIV-positive before having sex.
- Use a latex condom correctly every time you have sex. Women may use latex female condoms when a male condom cannot be used.
- Do not use injectable (needle) street drugs. If you cannot stop using injectable street drugs, ask for help. Never share or re-use equipment or needles.
- Do not touch other people's sores, cuts, blood or body fluids without using gloves.
- Have body piercing, tattoos, or acupuncture done only by a qualified caregiver.
- There is no fool-proof "morning-after" pill to take after possible exposure to HIV. Drug treatments are available after exposure to HIV or AIDS. These treatments are not available to everyone, and they may not prevent you from getting HIV or AIDS. The treatment lasts a long time and has health risks.
- Do not believe that because HIV and AIDS treatments and medicines are improving, you no longer need to take precautions. These medicines and treatments are hard to remember, have side effects, and may not work. They are expensive and needed for a long time, probably the rest of your life.