



## HIV/AIDS

Human Immunodeficiency Virus  
Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

### What is HIV/AIDS?

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is a virus that can infect the body and can sometimes lead to AIDS (Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome). HIV can spread from person to person during anal, vaginal, or oral sex. HIV can also be spread while sharing drug use, tattoo, or body piercing needles or equipment. In addition, HIV can be passed from an infected mother to her baby during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding. Over time, HIV attacks and weakens the immune system making an infected person vulnerable to a variety of infections and cancers. This stage of HIV infection is called AIDS. There is no vaccine to prevent HIV infection nor is there a cure, but there are ways to reduce your risk of becoming infected with HIV. In addition, there are treatments that can help a person with an HIV infection live a long and healthy life.

### Who is at risk for HIV/AIDS?

Anyone can get HIV/AIDS, but those at greater risk include:

- Men who have sex with other men (MSM)
- People who share injection drug equipment with other people
- People who have ever exchanged sex for drugs or money
- Anyone who has tested positive for an STD such as chlamydia, gonorrhea or syphilis
- Anyone who has had unprotected vaginal or anal sex (This risk increases with the number of sex partners)
- Transgendered persons

### What are the symptoms of HIV/AIDS?

Early on in an infection, symptoms are general and can resemble influenza like symptoms (fever, body aches, tiredness). Years after the exposure, symptoms can include persistent fever, night sweats, chronic fatigue, as well as other symptoms. Although these symptoms are associated with HIV, they are not specific to HIV and may have other causes. Most people with HIV have no symptoms at all for several years. Even if you don't have symptoms, you are still able to transmit the virus to others. You may remain symptom free for many years, but as the virus continues to multiply and destroy immune cells, you may develop more infections or chronic symptoms. You must be tested to determine your HIV status.

### How soon do symptoms appear?

If symptoms do appear, they generally present within several weeks of infection that can last a week or two. A person after this time may have no symptoms until the disease progresses further and the immune system becomes weak and cannot fight off even the mildest infections. These other infections are indicative that a person may be at or near an AIDS diagnosis. This could range from months to many years and is variable by the individual.

### How is HIV spread?

HIV is spread primarily through exposures to infectious body fluids, such as:

- |               |                                    |
|---------------|------------------------------------|
| Blood         | Breast milk                        |
| Semen         | Other body fluids containing blood |
| Vaginal fluid |                                    |

HIV is NOT transmitted through:

- |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| Kissing or holding hands | Sneezing or coughing                              |
| Sharing bathrooms        | Normal workplace, day care, or school interaction |

### **When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?**

HIV virus can be found in blood even before routine tests would indicate a person is positive and will persist throughout the lifetime of the infected person without proper treatment. Treatment can reduce the amount of virus in a person's system, but it is still possible to transmit the virus even when it is not detectable in the blood.

### **How is a person diagnosed?**

A health care professional can diagnose infected individuals using several blood tests.

### **What is the treatment for HIV/AIDS?**

Although there is no cure for HIV, there are medications that slow down the damage it does to the immune system. When they are effective, these medications can reduce the amount of HIV in a person's body. The medications do not work for everyone or completely rid the body of the virus. The most important thing you can do after you learn you have HIV is to work closely with your doctor. HIV and HIV-related illnesses vary from person to person, so your doctor will design a medical care plan specifically for you.

### **Should children or others be excluded from child care, school, work or other activities if they have HIV/AIDS?**

Children should not be excluded unless otherwise recommended by the health department and/or health care professional.

### **How can someone prevent HIV infection?**

To protect yourself from HIV infection:

- Avoid vaginal, oral or anal sex unless you know that you and your partner both do not have HIV
- Limit your number of sex partners
- Use latex condoms or barriers, when having vaginal, anal, or oral sex
- Don't share needles or other equipment for drug injection, piercings, or tattoos
- Talk to your health care provider about Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)
  - PrEP is a daily regimen of HIV medications that can be taken to prevent infection
- Get tested and treated for other STDs such as chlamydia, gonorrhea or syphilis

To prevent HIV in the workplace, standard precautions described by the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) as universal precautions always should be followed when blood or blood-containing body fluids are handled.

### **Additional Information:**

Additional information is available at [www.ndhealth.gov/HIV](http://www.ndhealth.gov/HIV) or by calling the North Dakota Department of Health HIV Program at 800.70.NDHIV (800.706.3448). **This disease is a reportable condition. As mandated by North Dakota law, any incidence of this disease shall be reported to the North Dakota Department of Health.**

### **Resources:**

Academy of Pediatrics. [Section 3, Summaries of Infectious Diseases]. In: Kimberlin DW, Brady MT, Jackson MA, Long SS eds. *Red Book: 2015 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 30<sup>th</sup> ed. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2015: [pages 453-476]

Heymann, D.L (ed). 2015. *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual* (20<sup>th</sup> edition). Washington: American Public Health Associates.