

ABOUT HIV

HIV and AIDS – the basics

HIV stands for **human immunodeficiency virus**.

Many people live with HIV for several years without any symptoms. But HIV continuously attacks the immune system and gradually causes damage. This can mean that, without treatment and care, a person with HIV is at risk of developing serious infections and cancers that a healthy immune system would fight off.

Current treatment for HIV works by reducing the amount of HIV in the body so the immune system can work normally. This doesn't get rid of HIV completely, but with the right treatment and care, someone with HIV can expect to live a long and healthy life.

AIDS

AIDS stands for acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

AIDS is the name used to describe a combination of potentially life-threatening infections and cancers, which can develop when someone's immune system has been seriously damaged by HIV.

If someone is diagnosed with AIDS, medical care and treatment is urgently needed. This can strengthen the immune system and return the person to good health. Thanks to effective HIV treatment, many people who developed AIDS are now very well and can look forward to a long and healthy life.

How do I know if I have HIV?

Having an HIV test is the only way to know for sure whether you have HIV.

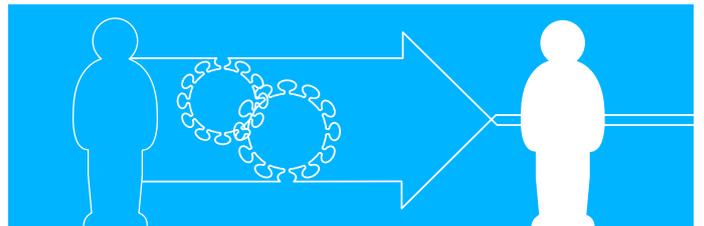
There are several different types of HIV tests. You may have a small sample of blood taken from your arm, or a drop of blood taken from your finger. Some tests are performed using fluid from around your gums.

The tests used today can usually tell if a person has HIV within a month of their infection. In the past you might have had to wait three months to be certain that your test result is accurate.

If the test says you are HIV positive, this means you have HIV. If the test says you are HIV negative, this means you do not have HIV.

With some tests, you will need to have a follow-up test if you have a positive result.

Usually, when you go for an HIV test, you will have an opportunity to talk to someone first, so you can ask any questions you might have. The person doing the test will explain how the test works and how you will get the results.



How is HIV transmitted?

HIV is found in the body fluids. It has been found to be present in infectious quantities in genital fluids (vaginal fluids, semen and moisture in the rectum), blood and breast milk.

The main ways in which HIV is passed on are:

- through unprotected anal, vaginal and oral sex,
- by sharing injecting equipment, and
- from a mother to her baby during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding.

But when people living with HIV are taking effective HIV treatment, this dramatically reduces the quantity of HIV in their body fluids. The risk of transmission is therefore extremely low.

Condoms also provide excellent protection against HIV transmission during sex.

If you inject drugs, you can reduce the risk of HIV and other infections by not sharing needles or other injecting equipment.

You cannot get HIV from kissing, by hugging, or by shaking hands with somebody with HIV – or any other normal social contact. Nor can you get HIV by being in the same place as someone with HIV, or by sharing household items such as crockery, cutlery, or bed linen.

HIV is not passed on by spitting, sneezing or coughing.

The development of www.pro-vich.info and www.about-hiv.info has been made possible thanks to generous support from Janssen. Our funder has had no editorial control over the content of either site. The information on this site is intended to support, rather than replace, consultation with a healthcare professional. Talk to your doctor or another member of your healthcare team for advice tailored to your situation.

A collaboration between: NAM aidsmap, European AIDS Treatment Group, Aids Action Europe, East Europe & Central Asia Union of PLWH and ITPCru (The Treatment Preparedness Coalition).

For more information: www.about-hiv.info; www.pro-vich.info; www.aidsmap.com

Registered UK Charity: 1011220