

HIV

What is HIV?

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a blood-borne and sexually transmitted infection that attacks and weakens a person's immune system. Without treatment, you can eventually become sick with the most serious stage of HIV infection called AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome).

What are the symptoms?

Many people with HIV may not have symptoms. Some people experience flu-like symptoms when they first get infected (fever, sore throat or swollen glands). Other symptoms can include:

- Weight loss
- Night sweats
- Muscle and joint pain

How is HIV spread?

HIV is spread through contact with infected body fluids including blood, semen, rectal and vaginal fluids, and breastmilk. Some ways HIV may be spread include:

- Medical equipment that has not been cleaned properly between uses
- Sharing drug equipment like needles, straws and pipes
- Pregnancy or childbirth when a mother is HIV positive
- Exposure to, or contact with infected blood through breaks in the skin or in the lining of the nose and mouth
- Using shared or unclean tools used for tattooing, body piercing or acupuncture that pierce the skin
- Unprotected sex with an infected person
- Sharing personal items like razors or toothbrushes

HIV is not spread through water, food or casual contact like hugging, kissing, shaking hands, using a toilet seat or through insect bites. HIV cannot be passed through healthy, unbroken skin.

How do I know if I have HIV?

A blood test is the only way to find out if you have HIV. There is more than one type of test used to detect HIV. Depending on the test, it may take up to three months before the test can detect the virus.

What is the treatment for HIV?

There is no cure for HIV, however, there have been significant advances in treatment. With careful assessment and treatment by a specialist people living with HIV can lead long and healthy lives.

Adapted from:

- Health Canada
- CATIE