

# HIV

*What you need to know*



*Learn about HIV/AIDS  
and how to protect yourself.*

*No matter what you've heard, HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, has not gone away. You cannot tell who is infected by how they look or by their lifestyle. They may look fine and healthy, but they can still pass the virus to you.*

## *HIV/AIDS Basics*

- ❖ HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. This is the virus that causes AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome).
- ❖ HIV attacks the body's immune system. People infected with HIV are more likely to become ill from infections and diseases that healthy persons usually can fight off.
- ❖ Once you are infected with HIV, you are infected for life.
- ❖ There is no cure or vaccine for HIV. But, there are medications that can help people with HIV stay healthy longer.
- ❖ A person infected with HIV may have no symptoms but can still infect others.

### *HIV cannot be spread by -*

- ❖ Giving blood
- ❖ Toilet seats
- ❖ Hot tubs
- ❖ Working with or being around someone with HIV
- ❖ Hugging
- ❖ Coughs or sneezes
- ❖ Shaking hands
- ❖ Sweat or tears
- ❖ Mosquitoes
- ❖ Simple (closed-mouth) kissing
- ❖ Eating food prepared or handled by an HIV-infected person

## *How do you get infected with HIV?*

HIV is found in the blood, semen and vaginal secretions of infected persons. It can be spread in the following ways:

- ❖ Having unprotected sex — vaginal, anal or oral — with an HIV-infected person (male or female)
- ❖ Sharing needles or injection equipment with an HIV-infected person to inject drugs (including hormones, insulin or steroids)
- ❖ From an HIV-infected woman to her baby during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding

Before 1985, some people were infected with HIV through blood transfusions or use of blood products. Since 1985, blood products have been screened for HIV, so infection through a blood transfusion is extremely rare.

## *You can protect yourself!*

- ❖ To avoid infection through sex, the only sure way is not to have sex — vaginal, anal or oral — or to have sex only with someone who is not infected and who only has sex with you.
- ❖ If you do have sex, correctly using a latex condom every time you have sex (anal, vaginal or oral) can greatly lower your risk of infection.
- ❖ For many people, using a condom can be tricky the first few times. Read instructions carefully and practice. Here are a few tips:
  - \* Check the expiration date on the condom. Don't keep a condom in your wallet or pocket for more than a few days. Your body heat can weaken it.
  - \* Put the condom on as soon as the penis is hard.
  - \* If you use a lubricant, be sure it is water-based.
  - \* After you come, hold the condom on the penis at the base and pull slowly out of your partner.

- ❖ Unprotected anal or vaginal sex puts you at much more risk for HIV than oral sex. However, some STDs are spread through oral sex. Use condoms or dental dams if you engage in oral sex.
- ❖ Avoid drugs and alcohol because they can increase your chances of infection and can lead to risky behaviors.
- ❖ Never share needles or injection equipment. Sharing needles or equipment to inject drugs, hormones, insulin or steroids even once can transmit HIV. This is because HIV from an infected person's blood can remain in a needle or injection equipment and can then be injected into the bloodstream of the next person using the equipment.

*You should seriously consider taking an HIV test if –*

- ❖ you are a man who has had sex with other men;
- ❖ you have shared injection needles or equipment;
- ❖ you have had sex with one or more partners whose sex and drug-using behaviors are unknown to you;
- ❖ you have had sex with someone who is infected with HIV or who falls into one of the above groups; or
- ❖ you (or your partner) are pregnant or considering pregnancy (early treatment can help to protect babies of HIV-infected mothers from being born with HIV).

If you are infected, knowing lets you make choices about how to protect your health, as well as the health of others. New treatments, too, can help you stay healthy longer.

If your HIV test is negative, you can live longer and healthier by taking steps now to avoid becoming infected with HIV and other STDs.

## *You can avoid HIV and STDs.*

- Talk to your partner about HIV.
- Take the lead; be the one to suggest condoms. It shows that you're smart and in control.
- Don't accept the pressure. If someone really cares about you, he or she will respect your choice to use condoms or not to have sex.
- Explore other ways to have fun, stay in control and be safe.
- Plan ahead to be safe. That way you'll have what you need when you need it.

*Got more questions?*

*We've got answers!*

You can always call the Illinois AIDS/HIV & STD Hotline at 1-800-243-2437 or TTY (hearing impaired use only) 1-800-782-0423. It's free and anonymous (no names). Trained counselors can help to answer your questions and help you to find a testing site that's right for you. They are available seven days a week (9 a.m. to 9 p.m. on weekdays and 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on weekends).



*"Is a baby in my future?"*

HIV/AIDS

# Facts for Life

- ❖ AIDS is a disease caused by HIV (human immunodeficiency virus).
- ❖ Testing is the only sure way to know if you are infected with HIV.
- ❖ A person infected with HIV may have no symptoms but can still infect others.
- ❖ HIV is spread through unprotected sex with an infected person. Both men and women can spread HIV.
- ❖ To avoid HIV infection through sex, don't have sex, or have sex only with a partner who isn't infected and who only has sex with you.
- ❖ Using condoms correctly every time you have sex reduces the risk of HIV infection.
- ❖ HIV also is spread by sharing needles and injection equipment.
- ❖ An infected woman can pass HIV to her baby during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding.
- ❖ Donating blood is safe.
- ❖ HIV is not spread by hugs, handshakes or kisses.
- ❖ HIV is not spread by mosquitoes.
- ❖ There is no cure or vaccine for HIV. However, current treatments can keep you healthier longer.

