

# Fact Sheet

## HIV/AIDS

### What is HIV? What is AIDS?

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a virus which attacks the immune system. If a person does not take medication, they may become ill with AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). People with AIDS get infections and cancers which may lead to an early death.

### How do you get HIV?

There are only four ways to get HIV:

1. Having unprotected vaginal or anal sex with a person who is infected; having unprotected oral sex with a person who is infected, especially when there is an untreated infection like syphilis.
2. Sharing infected needles, works or other drug use equipment.
3. Receiving infected blood or blood products (now rare in Canada).
4. From an infected mother to her fetus in the uterus; from an infected mother to her baby during delivery (more common); from an infected mother to her baby during breastfeeding.

Doctors offer HIV testing to all pregnant women.

### What are the symptoms?

A person may have symptoms like the flu, a rash or swollen glands in the first few weeks after infection.

### How is it diagnosed?

There is a blood test which checks for antibodies to HIV. This test is most accurate three months after infection. A person can have an anonymous test or a test with their name on it. It takes two weeks to get results. There are several clinics that offer a rapid finger prick test that give results in a few minutes.

### What are the complications?

If a person does not have treatment, they may get very sick and die prematurely.

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## How is it treated?

There is medication that can keep a person's immune system strong enough so they could live for at least 30 years after diagnosis.

## What about sexual partners?

People with HIV have to inform all past sexual partner(s) and all future sexual partners. They need to be tested and practise safer sex.

## What increases the risk of getting HIV?

Anyone can get HIV. There are some things that make it easier to get:

- having high-risk activities (unprotected vaginal or anal sex, sharing needles etc.) with a person who has HIV, especially in the first three months of their infection
- receiving unprotected vaginal or anal sex from a person who is infected
- having an untreated Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) like syphilis, herpes or chlamydia

## What decreases the risk of getting HIV?

- using a latex condom for oral, vaginal or anal sex
- using clean/new needles, syringes, or other drug use equipment
- do not share drug use equipment

**For more information call the  
AIDS and Sexual Health InfoLine at 416-392-2437**

### *SAFER SEX*

*To reduce your risk of getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI),  
use a condom every time you have vaginal, anal or oral sex.*

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