

Infection Prevention and You



World AIDS Day

December 1 is World AIDS Day. Learn how HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) and AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) are spread, and the impact it can have on your life. For detailed answers about HIV basics, see APIC's consumer alert on HIV/AIDS (*below*).

The basic facts about HIV remain unchanged. HIV is a virus that is spread through blood and body fluids, most commonly by unprotected sex with an infected partner or through sharing drug injection equipment with a person who is infected with HIV. It's also possible for a mother to pass HIV to her baby during pregnancy, through childbirth, or breastfeeding. The disease can also be spread by getting HIV-contaminated blood into one's eyes, nose, mouth, or breaks in the skin.

There is no cure for HIV, but medicines (known as antiretroviral therapy), if taken according to your doctor's orders, can help manage the disease. Stopping treatment or not starting it at all means the disease will eventually be fatal. That's why it's so important to know your HIV status.

What is the current state of HIV?

There are 1.2 million people with HIV with just under 50,000 new infections every year. Many of those infections come from people who don't know they are infected. One in eight people don't know they have the virus. They seem healthy, may not have any noticeable symptoms, and have not been tested. Those who haven't been diagnosed can unknowingly pass the virus through unprotected sex, drug use, pregnancy, or childbirth. It is not possible to spread the virus through casual contact like shaking hands, hugging, touching door knobs, or sitting on toilet seats.

Is knowing your status enough to stop the spread of HIV?

No. Knowing your HIV status is a start, but there are additional ways to minimize your risk of contracting the virus. You can reduce your risk by properly using condoms during sex and not sharing needles or other injecting equipment. Also, by getting proper care during pregnancy and childbirth, it's entirely possible to prevent mother-to-child transmission.

Additional resources

CDC—HIV in the United States: At A Glance <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/statistics/overview/ataglance.html>

AIDS.gov <https://www.aids.gov/>

AIDS info—HIV Overview <https://aidsinfo.nih.gov/education-materials/fact-sheets/19/45/hiv-aids--the-basics>

APIC consumer alert—The very basics about HIV and AIDS <http://www.apic.org/For-Consumers/Monthly-alerts-for-consumers/Article?id=the-very-basics-about-hiv-and-aids>

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