

## AIDS and HIV

### Basic causes and prevention

Acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), which is caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), has had a profound effect on global thinking about health and disease since it was first identified in the 1980s.

HIV attacks the immune system, causing gradual damage that can lead to serious infections and cancers that a healthy immune system would fight off.<sup>1</sup> An HIV test is the only way to know if you are HIV-positive and susceptible to AIDS.

Current treatment for HIV works by reducing the amount of the virus in the body, enabling the immune system to 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.

HIV is present in blood, genital fluids, and breast milk. The main ways HIV can be passed on to someone else are:

- unprotected sex
- sharing needles
- coming into contact with infected blood
- from a mother to her baby during pregnancy or birth, or through breastfeeding

Anyone can get HIV, but there are steps you can take to protect yourself from infection:<sup>2</sup>

- Get tested and know your partner's HIV status. Talk to your partner about HIV testing and get tested before you have sex.
- Avoid risky sex. HIV is mainly spread by having anal or vaginal sex without a condom or without taking medicines to prevent or treat HIV.

- Use condoms. Use a condom correctly every time you have sex.
- Limit your number of sexual partners. The more partners you have, the more likely you are to have a partner with HIV whose HIV is not well controlled or to have a partner with a sexually transmitted disease (STD).
- Get tested and treated for STDs. Insist that your partners get tested and treated too. Having an STD can increase your risk of becoming infected with HIV or spreading it to others.

While treatment options have advanced considerably in recent years, AIDS and HIV are still a threat to be taken seriously. As with any medical testing, a second opinion can often be central to informed decisions about lifestyle and treatment.

Regardless of your lifestyle or circumstances, you can always count on Best Doctors to continue backing you up with detailed, elaborate investigation and consideration of your specific diagnosis. Our experts review your case thoroughly and provide objective, comprehensive analysis that can help you manage your healthcare.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.aidsmap.com/>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.unaids.org/en/topic/prevention>

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