

What is HIV?

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is the virus that causes HIV infection, which weakens the body's immune system over time making it increasingly difficult for the body to fight off infection and disease. People with HIV may have no symptoms, a few symptoms or many serious symptoms. They may not even know they are infected, but they can still pass the virus on to others. There is no cure. Many treatment options are available that aim to stop the progression of HIV. Individual responses to treatment vary and depend on many factors.

What is AIDS?

AIDS stands for:

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

Over time, as HIV infection damages the body's immune system other diseases, infections, and cancers can occur in the body. This final stage of HIV disease is called AIDS. It is important to note that with new treatments people can live many years with AIDS. It is important to remember there is no cure.

Transmission of HIV

HIV is can be transmitted through these and only these body fluids: blood, semen, vaginal/cervical secretions, and breast milk.

There Are Three Main Ways To Transmit HIV.

- **Transmission through Sexual Contact**
anal sex, vaginal sex, and less likely via oral sex
- **Exposure through blood:**
sharing needles for piercing, tattooing and injection drug use (legal and illegal drugs)
- **Perinatal**
during pregnancy, birth or through breast feeding

Safer Sex

Safer sex is preventing or limiting the exchange of body fluids during sexual activities. Protecting yourself from HIV can depend on many factors, including choosing safer sex practices, the health status of the mouth and skin, the influence of alcohol and drugs on decision making abilities and if other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's see our STD brochure) are present in the body. The key question to ask yourself is, *How much risk am I willing to live with?* (see our SAFER SEX Brochure).

Alcohol and Drugs

Alcohol and other drugs do not cause HIV infection or other sexually transmitted infections (STI's). However, alcohol and drugs are often major factors when people have unsafe sex.

Alcohol and drugs can:

- Impair your judgment.
- Limit your ability to communicate effectively.
- HIV and Hepatitis C can be transmitted through sharing needles for drug use (including hormones or prescription medicine).
- Sharing needles for body piercing and tattoos can also transmit HIV and Hepatitis C.

Health Disparities and HIV

Good health is not distributed equally in our society (or the world) and HIV is no exception. HIV infection rates are increasing the fastest in gay men, low income populations, people of color, women, and youth. Working in partnership/community with others in support and advocacy for social justice issues is an essential element of comprehensive of HIV prevention.

The HIV Test

The HIV test looks for HIV antibodies in your body.

If you have antibodies for HIV, your test results will be positive. This means you are infected with HIV and can transmit HIV to others.

If you don't have antibodies for HIV, your test results will be negative. This means one of two things: You don't have HIV or you have been infected with HIV, but your body hasn't made antibodies yet.

The Window Period

It takes up to 6 months after infection for the body to make HIV antibodies and show a positive HIV test. This 6 month period is called the "window period" during which time a person who is HIV infected can transmit the virus to others without having a positive HIV test.



Harm Reduction Prevention

Harm Reduction is a set of strategies that encourage people to reduce harm to themselves and their communities, even if they are unable to eliminate harm by abstaining from a risky behavior. The guiding principle of harm reduction is that any positive change in your life that protects or promotes your health is a good one (see our Harm Reduction Brochure).

Protect Yourself!

- Use a new latex condom and a water-based lubricant for vaginal or anal sex.
- Clean your works or use needle exchange programs.
- Talk with friends, family, youth and everyone you know about HIV prevention.
- Using alcohol or other drugs affects judgment and can lead to unsafe sex.
- Participate in community events that support HIV prevention.
- Learn more about HIV and its impact on your community and worldwide.
- Organize and lead events that support people to take control of the conditions that determine their health and the wellbeing of our communities.

For Further Information:

Project SAFE

Ocean Campus Cloud 405
Information, Referrals & Safer Sex Supplies

San Francisco AIDS Foundation Hotline

415.487.3000 or 1.800.FOR.AIDS, www.sfaf.org

Center For Disease Control & Prevention

CDC HIV & STI Info: 1.800.232.4636 or 1.800.CDC.INFO
www.cdc.gov

California AIDS Hotline

1.800.367.2437

San Francisco Sex Information Hotline

415.989.7374

Needle Exchange

HIV Prevention Project

415.241.1500, www.sfaf.org



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