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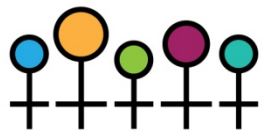
11 Misconceptions & Myths About HIV

Together, we can change the course of the HIV epidemic...one woman at a time.

#onewomanatatime

www.thewellproject.org

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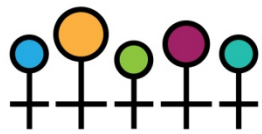


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Misconceptions & Myths About HIV

Myth (n.): A story or an idea that **is not true**.





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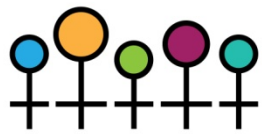
Misconceptions & Myths About HIV/AIDS

Why are myths about HIV/AIDS harmful? They can:

- Result in denial and fear
- Fuel HIV-related stigma, which keeps people from being tested, seeking HIV care, reaching out for support
- Result in damage to your health

Why are there so many myths about HIV/AIDS?

- HIV and AIDS were initially mysterious and misunderstood conditions with unfamiliar symptoms that led to death
- People reacted with fear, created stories to back up their fear
- HIV and AIDS became associated with stigmatized behaviors, including sexual contact, drug injection



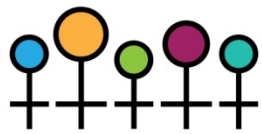
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Myth #1

The Myth:
**"HIV does not
cause AIDS."**

The Reality: While AIDS denialists may argue that HIV is caused by a variety of alternatives (party drugs, AZT, government conspiracies, others), more than 20 years of solid scientific proof has verified that only HIV (the human immunodeficiency virus) causes AIDS.

If you have AIDS, you have HIV. If you do not have HIV, you cannot get AIDS.



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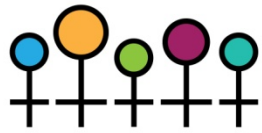
Myth #2

Myth:
**"HIV/AIDS was
invented."**



Reality: HIV/AIDS was not invented in laboratory. HIV/AIDS is not the result of government conspiracies.

HIV is one of many blood borne viruses. It is transmitted by blood, semen, vaginal fluid, breast milk.



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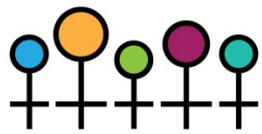
Myth #3

The Myth: **“HIV is a death sentence.”**



The Reality: This used to be true. In the 1980s, there was still little know about how to treat people living with HIV or AIDS. Due to lack of knowledge, absence of effective medications, and fear many people died.

We now have a range of drugs that help people living with HIV to live long healthy lives



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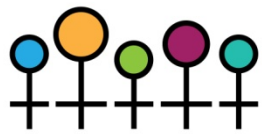
Myth #4

The Myth:
**"There is a
cure for HIV."**

The Reality: Unfortunately, there is no universal cure for HIV yet, though scientists are working hard to find one.

There have been isolated cases in which someone previously living with HIV no longer has detectable virus in their system that is able to replicate, or multiply, and spread. The “Berlin patient” is one example.

These cases provide hope and clues for a potential cure.



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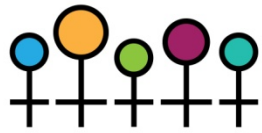
Myth #5

The Myth:
**“I’ll be fine if I stop
taking HIV drugs
for a while
(take a 'drug
holiday').”**

The Reality: Studies show that taking HIV drugs as directed is the way to stay healthiest longest. Taking a 'drug holiday' can:

- Give the virus a chance to multiply – causing viral load to rise – or develop resistance to HIV drugs
- Cause CD4 cell count to drop and immune system to weaken





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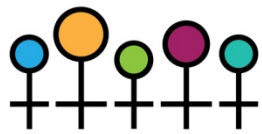
Myth #6

The Myth: **“People with HIV look sick.”**



The Reality: People living with HIV may not look sick, feel sick, or even know they have acquired HIV.

CDC estimates that 1 in 6 people living with HIV in the U.S. don't know it. Taking an HIV test is the only way of knowing if you or someone else is living with HIV.



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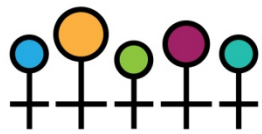
Myth #7

The Myth:
**"Straight
people do not
get HIV."**



The Reality: Most people living with HIV worldwide are straight (heterosexual). Risk is not about labels or categories of people.

Any person who has unprotected sex or shares needles (diabetic, injection drugs, tattoos, hormones, etc.) with someone puts themselves at risk for HIV.



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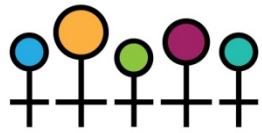
Myth #8

The Myth:
**"I'm safe because
I'm in a
monogamous
relationship."**



The Reality: In an ideal world, if you and your partner remained monogamous & tested negative for HIV after the 3-month window since your last possible exposures, sex without condoms/other barriers would be safe. But there remain many “ifs.”

Please do not confuse love or commitment with safety from HIV. If you don't know your partner's status, and cannot use condoms, consider taking PrEP.



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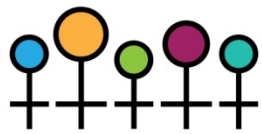
Myth #9

The Myth: **“Lesbians do not get HIV.”**



The Reality: While women who only ever have sex with women are generally at a lower risk for getting any STI, there are still risk factors:

- Rougher sex with tearing/bleeding
- Sharing sex toys with sexual partners
- Past sexual history with men
- Sharing needles or drug equipment
- Ongoing sex with both men and women



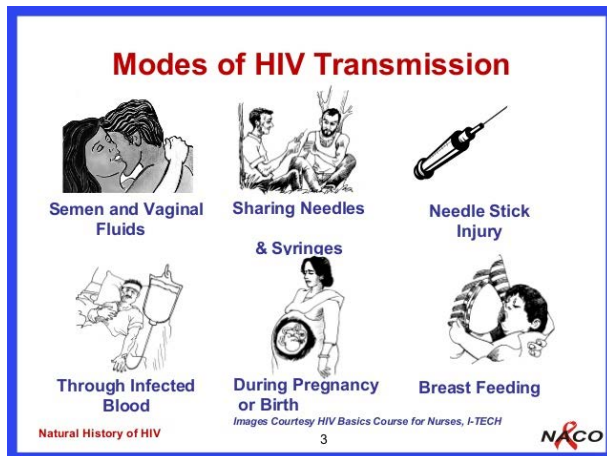
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Myth #10

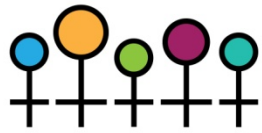
The Myth:

"HIV can be spread through tears, sweat, mosquitoes, pools, or casual contact."

The Reality: HIV is only transmitted through HIV-containing blood, semen (pre-cum and cum), vaginal fluids, and breast milk.



The most common ways for HIV to be transmitted are through unprotected sexual contact and/or sharing needles with a person living with HIV.



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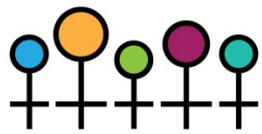
Myth #11

The Myth:

"I cannot have a baby because I have HIV."

The Reality: With proper health care and HIV drugs, women living with HIV can have healthy pregnancies. There are many things you can do to help keep your partner and your baby from acquiring HIV.

If a mother takes HIV drugs as prescribed and is virally suppressed, the chances of vertical transmission (spreading HIV to the baby) can be less than 1 percent.



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Myth #12

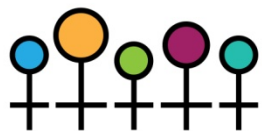
The Myth:

**“Clinical trials are unsafe.
If I enroll in a study, I
won’t be allowed to
leave if I don’t like it.”**



The Reality: You are always in control. You can quit any study you participate in at any time for any reason.

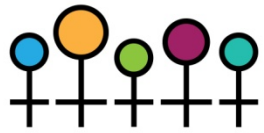
The U.S. government now has strict rules and regulations that all researchers must follow to protect participants in clinical trials. Clinical trials in other countries are subject to the rules and regulations set up by their countries' governments.



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Get the Facts!

- **Myths about HIV are very harmful.** They can cause you to be afraid of something that is not dangerous. And they can make you feel like something is not dangerous when it really is!
- It is important to learn the truth and get the facts right. Sometimes seemingly well-informed or well-meaning people give out wrong information.
- Questions about HIV? Keep informed through resources like [The Well Project](#), talk to your health care provider, your local HIV organization, or call the CDC National AIDS Hotline at 1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636).
- Outside the US? Look for local resources on [AIDSmap's e-atlas](#).



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Learn More!

- To learn more, please read the full fact sheet on this topic:
 - [Myths about HIV](#)
- For more fact sheets and to connect to our community of women living with HIV, visit:
 - www.thewellproject.org
 - www.facebook.com/thewellproject
 - www.twitter.com/thewellproject