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What Are HIV & AIDS?

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

#onewomanatatime

www.thewellproject.org

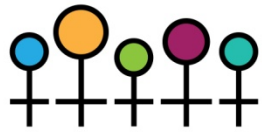
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What Is HIV?



HIV stands for: **H**uman
Immunodeficiency **V**irus

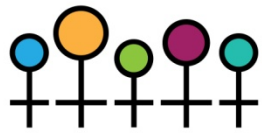
HIV is the virus that causes the condition of AIDS, but not everyone who is living with HIV has AIDS, or will ever have AIDS.



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How Does HIV Affect a Person's Body?

- **Your immune system is your body's defense system**
- While many viruses can be controlled by the immune system, HIV infects the same immune system cells (CD4 cells, or “T-cells”) that usually protect us from germs and illnesses
- Without medication to control the virus, HIV eventually takes over CD4 cells, turning them into factories that produce thousands of HIV copies
- As the virus makes copies, it damages or kills the CD4 cells, weakening the immune system's ability to protect the body
- **This is how HIV causes AIDS**



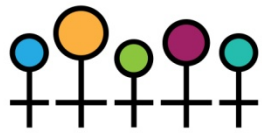
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What Is AIDS?

AIDS stands for
Acquired
Immune
Deficiency
Syndrome

In the official definition,
AIDS is the most
advanced stage of HIV

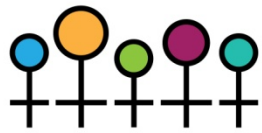
- When the immune system loses too many CD4 cells, you are less able to fight off illness and can develop serious, often deadly, infections (called opportunistic infections or OIs)
- “AIDS” refers to the weakened state of the body’s immune system.
- **However, today many people can have an AIDS diagnosis but be very healthy and at low risk of OIs.**



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What Is the Difference Between HIV and AIDS?

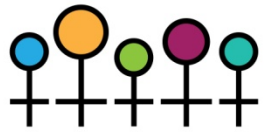
- The definition of AIDS was established **before** there was effective treatment for HIV. It indicated that a person was at higher risk of illness or death. It is no longer as relevant, because:
 - Effective treatment means people can stay healthier with low CD4 counts
 - Someone could have received the AIDS diagnosis years ago and still have it even though they are not at higher risk of illness
- Someone has AIDS if (s)he is living with HIV and has:
 - At least one “AIDS-defining condition” (from a list of OIs, cancers, conditions whose presence shows the immune system has become weakened) **and/or**
 - A CD4 cell count of 200 cells or fewer (normal CD4 count =500 -1,500)



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What Is the Difference Between HIV and AIDS?

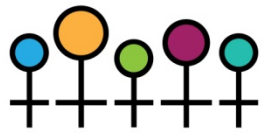
- You do not have AIDS upon acquiring HIV
- Individuals can live with HIV for many years with no signs of disease, or only mild-to-moderate symptoms
- In most people, **without treatment**, HIV will eventually wear down the immune system to the point that CD4 cells fall and OIs develop
 - At that point, they are considered to have AIDS
 - They can still get on treatment and improve their health and lower risk of illness
- People who have HIV and are on treatment have very low risk of progressing to AIDS
- Some people may already fit an AIDS diagnosis when they find out they have HIV – they may or may not feel sick



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Once I Have an AIDS Diagnosis, Will I Always Have AIDS?

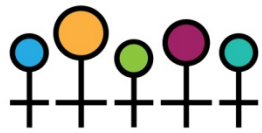
- People with AIDS can rebuild their immune systems with the help of HIV drugs, just like people with HIV who don't have AIDS
- However, even if your CD4 cell count goes back above 200 or an OI is successfully treated, you will still have a diagnosis of AIDS
- **This does not necessarily mean you are sick or will get sick in the future**
- It's just the way the public health system counts the number of people who have ever reached the advanced stage of HIV



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How Does a Person Know if They Have HIV?

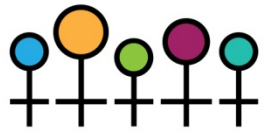
- Most people can't tell they've acquired HIV
- When HIV enters a person's body, symptoms may show up within 2-4 weeks (fever, swollen glands, muscle aches, headache, rash)
 - Symptoms occur as a person's body begins to make antibodies (special proteins that identify "intruders" like viruses and bacteria) against HIV
 - This time period is called "seroconversion"
- Some people don't have any symptoms, don't notice them because they are mild, or believe they have a cold or the flu
- **The only way for someone to know for sure if they've become HIV positive is to take an HIV test**



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Who Should Get Tested for HIV?

- U.S. guidelines recommend everyone age 13-64 be screened for HIV at least once
- Anyone who answers “yes” to any of these questions should also be tested :
 - *Have you ever had penile-vaginal, penile-anal, or oral sex without a condom or other latex barrier? (NOTE: Oral sex is a very low risk activity. Vaginal and anal sex are much higher risk)*
 - *Are you uncertain of your partner’s status or is your partner living with HIV?*
 - *Are you pregnant or considering pregnancy?*
 - *Have you ever had a sexually transmitted disease (STD)?*
 - *Do you have hepatitis C (HCV)?*
 - *Have you ever shared needles, syringes, or other equipment to inject drugs (including steroids or hormones)?*

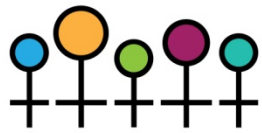


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Who Should Get Tested for HIV?

For people who plan to become pregnant, testing is especially important.

In the U.S., if a person is living with HIV, HIV care and treatment during pregnancy can lower the chance that the baby will acquire HIV to less than 1%.

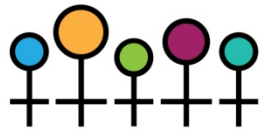


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What Tests Are Available?

- If you've acquired HIV, your immune system will make antibodies against the virus
- The most common HIV tests look for these antibodies in your blood, urine, or oral fluid (not your saliva)
- A test will be able to detect these antibodies after 3-6 months
- The period between HIV acquisition and your body's production of antibodies is called the "window period"

A negative HIV test after the window period means you do not have HIV from activities conducted before the window period.



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What Tests Are Available?

- If you have some symptoms of initial/acute HIV, and want to get tested before the window period (before your body has a chance to make antibodies), you can get tested for HIV antigen.
- Antigens: pieces of HIV virus or viral particles
- HIV antigen tests can identify HIV infection as quickly as two weeks after exposure to HIV

Where Can I Get Tested?

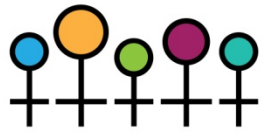
- You can get an HIV test at a health clinic, private health care provider's office, HIV testing center, or health department
- In the US: use [AIDS.gov](https://aids.gov) service locator to find sites
- Globally: use NAM's [e-atlas](https://e-atlas.nam-aids.org) to find services
- You can also order HIV tests online or buy them over-the-counter at pharmacies
 - This allows you to collect a sample or complete a full rapid test (20 minutes) in the privacy of your home

How Is HIV Spread?

- HIV is spread through contact with these body fluids:
 - Blood (including menstrual blood)
 - Semen (“cum”) and other male sexual fluids (“pre-cum”)
 - Vaginal fluids
 - Breast milk
- Most commonly spread from person-to-person through [unprotected sex](#) (no condoms or other barriers), [sharing needles](#) used for injecting drugs, and [mother-to-child](#) (during pregnancy, birth, or breast-feeding)

How Is HIV Spread?

- HIV is NOT spread through contact with these body fluids:
 - Sweat
 - Tears
 - Saliva (spit)
 - Feces (poop)
 - Urine (pee)
- You CANNOT get HIV by:
 - touching or hugging someone who is living with HIV
 - kissing someone living with HIV
 - using a toilet also used by someone living with HIV



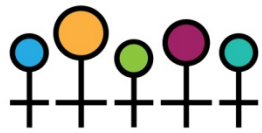
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Is There a Vaccine to Prevent HIV?

There is neither a vaccine nor a cure for HIV.

The best way to prevent HIV is to use consistent prevention methods, including:

- Safer sex: choosing low- or no-risk activities, using condoms, taking PrEP (an HIV prevention daily pill)
- Sterile needles (for drugs, hormones, or tattoos)



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Learn More!

- To learn more, please read the full fact sheet on this topic:
 - [What Are HIV & AIDS?](#)
- 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