What Are HIV & AIDS?

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

#onewomanatatime

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What Is HIV?

HIV stands for: **Human Immunodeficiency Virus**

HIV is the virus that causes 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
- HIV infects the same immune system cells that protect us
  - White blood cells called CD4 cells, a type of T cells
- Without medication, HIV turns CD4 cells into factories that produce millions of copies of the virus
- During copying, HIV damages or kills the CD4 cells
  - This weakens the immune system
- This is how HIV causes AIDS
- Different HIV strains, grouped into HIV-1, HIV-2
  - A person can have several strains at once
What Is AIDS?

AIDS stands for

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

In the official definition,

AIDS is the most advanced stage of HIV

• Too many lost CD4 cells: body is less able to fight off infections
• Can develop serious infections (opportunistic infections or OIs)
• “AIDS” refers to the weakened state of the body’s immune system.
• Today people can have an AIDS diagnosis but be very healthy and at low risk of OIs
• Death from AIDS is due to OIs and weakened immune system

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What Is the Difference Between HIV and AIDS?

• You do not have AIDS as soon as you acquire HIV
• You can live with HIV for many years with no signs of disease, or only mild-to-moderate symptoms
• **Without treatment**, HIV will eventually wear down the immune system: CD4 levels will fall and OIs will develop
  – At that point, the person is considered to have AIDS
  – Treatment can still improve their health and lower their risk for illness
• AIDS diagnosis may remain despite treated OI or higher CD4 count
  – Doesn’t mean person is sick or will get sick
  – Just public health system’s way of counting
What Is the Difference Between HIV and AIDS?

• Definition of AIDS was established before there was effective treatment for HIV. Indicated that a person was at higher risk of illness or death but no longer as relevant in some countries:
  – If available, effective treatment means people can stay healthier with low CD4 counts
  – Someone’s immune system may have recovered after an AIDS diagnosis years ago, but their diagnosis may remain

• Someone has AIDS if (s)he is living with HIV and has:
  – At least one “AIDS-defining condition” (from specific list) and/or
  – A CD4 cell count of 200 cells or fewer (normal CD4 count = 500 -1,500)
How Do I Know if I Have HIV?

- People can't tell they've acquired HIV
- Symptoms may show up within 2-4 weeks after acquiring HIV
  - Fever, swollen glands, sore throat night sweats, muscle aches, headache, fatigue, rash
- HIV antibodies develop within 1-3 months (“window period”)
- May not have symptoms or think you have the flu
- The only way for someone to know for sure if they’ve acquired HIV is to have an HIV test
  - Get tested for *antigens* (pieces of virus) during window period
  - Get tested for *antibodies* after window period

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Do I Need to Get Tested for HIV?

• Everyone age 13-64 in US should be screened for HIV at least once
• Virus does not discriminate by age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, social group or economic class!
• If you answer “yes” to any of these questions, get tested:
  – Have you ever had a penis inserted into your vagina or anus ("butt"), or oral sex without a condom or other latex barrier (e.g., dental dam)? *Note:* oral sex is a low-risk activity. Vaginal and anal sex are much higher risk.
  – Do you not know your partner’s HIV status or is your partner living with HIV?
  – Are you pregnant or considering becoming pregnant?
  – Have you ever had a sexually transmitted infection or disease (STI or STD)?
  – Do you have hepatitis C (HCV)?
  – Have you ever shared needles, syringes, or other equipment to inject drugs (including steroids or hormones)?
Why Should I Get Tested?

- If HIV negative, you can stop worrying about exposure
  - Consider taking PrEP or PEP to prevent HIV acquisition
- If HIV+, take effective medications to stay healthy.
  - If on effective meds, can’t transmit HIV sexually (U=U)
- If you plan to become pregnant, HIV testing very important
  - Certain HIV drugs can lower the chance of passing the virus to the baby
Where Can I Get Tested?

• US testing site resources:
  – National HIV, STD and Hepatitis Testing website
    • https://gettested.cdc.gov/
  – HIV.gov website
    • https://www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics/hiv-testing/learn-about-hiv-testing/where-to-get-tested/
  – CDC information line
    • 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636); TTY: 888-232-6348
  – State HIV/AIDS hotline
    • List at https://ryanwhite.hrsa.gov/hiv-care/hotlines
• More information in HIV Testing factsheet
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, sharing needles and from pregnant person to their child

- **Not** passed on during sex by a person on treatment with undetectable viral load for more than six months

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How Is HIV Spread?

• HIV is **not** spread through contact with these body fluids:
  – Sweat
  – Tears
  – Saliva (spit)
  – Feces (poop)
  – Urine (pee)

• You CANNOT acquire 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
Is There a Vaccine or Cure for HIV?

Neither a vaccine nor a cure for HIV

To prevent HIV, use consistent prevention methods:

• Safer sex: choose low- or no-risk activities, use condoms, take HIV drugs (if living with HIV) or PrEP (if HIV-negative)

• Sterile needles (for drugs, hormones, or tattoos)

• For more information, Well Project fact sheets on:
  – HIV Vaccines
  – Finding a Cure

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Well Project fact sheets:

- HIV Testing
- Did You Just Test HIV-Positive?
- Considerations Before Starting HIV Treatment
- HIV Transmission
- Safer Sex
- Undetectable Equals Untransmittable: Building Hope and Ending HIV Stigma
- Pregnancy, Birth and HIV
- Women and HIV

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• 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