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What Are HIV & AIDS?

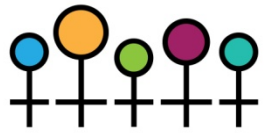
Last updated: November 7, 2024

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

#onewomanatathetime

www.thewellproject.org

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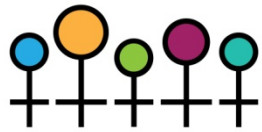
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What Is HIV?



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

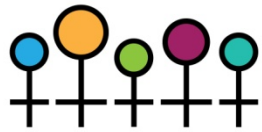
HIV is the virus that causes
AIDS, but not everyone
who is living with HIV has
AIDS, or will ever have
AIDS.



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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
 - HIV tests in US look for both strains



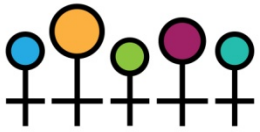
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What Is AIDS?

AIDS stands for
Acquired
Immune
Deficiency
Syndrome

AIDS is the most
advanced stage of HIV

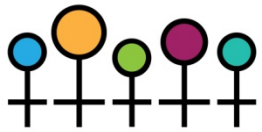
- Too many lost CD4 cells: body is less able to fight off infections
- Can develop serious infections (opportunistic infections or OIs)
- “AIDS” refers to the weakened state of the body’s immune system.
- Death from AIDS is due to OIs and weakened immune system



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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



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What Is the Difference Between HIV and AIDS?

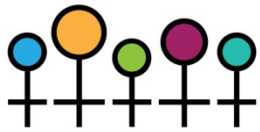
- Definition of AIDS was established **before** there was effective treatment for HIV. Indicated that a person was at higher risk of illness or death but no longer as relevant in some countries:
 - If available, effective treatment means people can stay healthier with low CD4 counts
 - Someone's immune system may have recovered after an AIDS diagnosis years ago, but their diagnosis remains
- Someone has AIDS if they are living with HIV and have ever had:
 - 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)



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How Do I Know if I Have HIV?

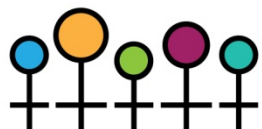
- People can't tell they've acquired HIV
- Symptoms may show up within 2-4 weeks after acquiring HIV
 - Fever, swollen glands, sore throat, night sweats, muscle aches, headache, fatigue, rash
- HIV antibodies develop within 1-3 months (“window period”)
- May not have symptoms or think you have the flu
- **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)?



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Why Should I Get Tested?

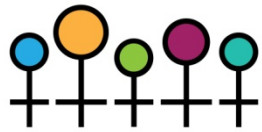
- If HIV negative, you can stop worrying about exposure
 - Consider taking PrEP or PEP to prevent HIV acquisition
- If HIV+, take effective medications to stay healthy.
 - If on effective meds, can't transmit HIV sexually (U=U)
- If you plan to become pregnant, HIV testing very important
 - Certain HIV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



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Where Can I Get Tested?

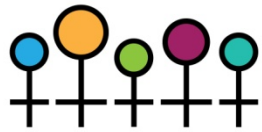
- US testing site resources:
 - National HIV, STD and Hepatitis Testing website
 - <https://gettested.cdc.gov/>
 - HIV.gov website
 - <https://www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics/hiv-testing/learn-about-hiv-testing/where-to-get-tested/>
 - CDC information line
 - 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636); TTY: 888-232-6348
 - State HIV/AIDS hotline
 - List at <https://ryanwhite.hrsa.gov/hiv-care/hotlines>
- More information in [HIV Testing](#) factsheet



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How Is HIV Spread?

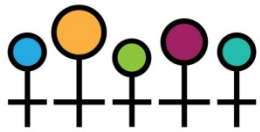
- HIV is spread through contact with these body fluids:
 - Blood (including menstrual blood)
 - Semen (“cum”) and other male sexual fluids (“pre-cum”)
 - Vaginal fluids
 - Breast milk
- Most commonly spread from person to person through unprotected sex, sharing needles and from pregnant person to their child



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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



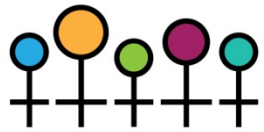
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Is There a Vaccine or Cure for HIV?

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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Additional Information

The 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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Learn More!

- To learn more, please read the full fact sheet:
 - [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.x.com/thewellproject
 - www.instagram.com/thewellprojecthiv
 - www.youtube.com/thewellprojecthiv