

# What is HIV/AIDS?

## What is HIV? A virus that can infect humans.

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) causes Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), a long-term disease that cannot be cured.

**H**= Human: You

**I**= Immunodeficiency: HIV weakens your immune system by killing good cells that help your body fight diseases and infection. When you have HIV, you are more likely to get infections and different diseases than someone who has a strong immune system.

**V**= Virus: It can only copy itself by taking over a good cell in your body.

## What is Aids? The disease that is caused by HIV.

**A**= Acquired: You get it from another person. You don't inherit it from your parents.

**I**= Immuno: Your immune system. All the cells and organs that fight off disease and infection.

**D**= Deficiency: You get AIDS when your immune system is not working right.

**S**= Syndrome: A collection of symptoms, a complex disease.

## How do you get HIV?

- Unprotected sexual contact with someone who has the disease
- Drug use/sharing of used needles
- Rare but with an organ transplant or blood transfusion
- Childbirth and breastfeeding, if mom has the disease

HIV is found in bodily fluids. These fluids are:

- Blood
- Semen
- Pre seminal fluid
- Breast milk
- Vaginal fluids
- Rectum anal mucosa (inside the anus)

Other body fluids don't have enough HIV in them to cause an infection unless there is blood mixed in or if you have significant contact with them. These fluids are:

- Feces
- Urine
- Saliva
- Sweat
- Tears
- Vomit

Aids is the late stage of HIV when a person's immune system is badly damaged and has a hard time fighting diseases and certain cancer.

The only way to know for sure if you have HIV/AIDS is by a test given to you by your primary care provider.



## Signs and Symptoms:

You want to talk with your Primary Care Provider as symptoms of HIV may not occur and the symptoms of AIDS start when you begin to feel ill.

Early symptoms of HIV: 2-3 weeks after exposure to the virus up to 3 months.

Symptoms can include:

- Fever
- Chills
- Rash
- Night sweats
- Muscle aches
- Sore throat
- Fatigue
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Ulcers in the mouth

After the initial infection the virus becomes less active in the body, although it is still present. During this period, many people do not have any symptoms of HIV infection. This period is called the “chronic” or “latency” phase. This period can last up to 10 years—sometimes longer.

## Early symptoms of AIDS:

- Fatigue
- Vomiting
- Night sweats
- Diarrhea
- Fever
- Nausea
- Chills

Many of the signs and symptoms of AIDS come from other infections which occur in patients with damaged immune systems.

## **ALWAYS be open and honest with your primary care provider about things like:**

Medication—Have you missed any doses of medication? Have you taken them on time? Make sure you take your meds as prescribed.

Side effects—Are you experiencing any problems with your meds? Have you noticed any changes in your body (e.g., fatigue, weight loss, diarrhea) that might be related to your HIV meds?

Sexual activity—Are you having sexual contact? Are you protecting yourself and your partner(s)?

If your provider asks you to take other medical tests or gives you a referral to a lab or another provider, follow up promptly. These tests and referrals need to be done on time. This is so that you and your healthcare provider have the information and support you both need to manage your care and keep you healthy.

Some tests that might be ordered for you:

- Mouth Swab
- Blood
- Urine

These test may be ordered once a year or more frequently by your Primary Care Provider.

## **You Can Manage your HIV/AIDS!**

- A variety of drugs can be used to control the virus within your body. Take your meds as prescribed.
- Eat healthy foods
  - Fresh fruits and vegetables
  - Whole grain
  - Lean meats: chicken, pork
  - Avoid raw seafood, eggs and unpasteurized dairy products
- Get shots that are recommended by your primary care provider
- Be physically active
- Take care of your mind and spirit –consider counseling

## **REFERENCES**

**Aids Foundation of Chicago**  
200 West Jackson Blvd.  
Suite 2200  
Chicago, IL 60606  
aidschicago.org

---

**If you have any questions about HIV/AIDS, call Enrollee Services. The phone number to call is 866-871-2305 or talk to your primary care provider.**