

# FACT SHEET

# HIV

## What is HIV?

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) weakens a person's immune system by destroying important cells that fight disease and infection. If HIV isn't treated it can lead to AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome). As the virus gradually destroys these cells, the immune system becomes unable to protect against illness. No effective cure exists for HIV. With proper medical care, HIV can be controlled.

## How is it spread?

Exposure to HIV infected blood, semen, or vaginal fluids into your body can put you at risk. This can happen through unprotected anal, oral, or vaginal sex, and by sharing needles.

## What are the symptoms?

- Fever
- Chills
- Rash
- Night sweats
- Muscle aches
- Sore throat
- Fatigue
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Mouth ulcers

## How is it prevented?

- Practice abstinence.
- If you choose to have sex, use a new latex condom with a water-based lubricant every time you have sex.
- Don't share needles, toothbrushes, eating utensils or razors that could be contaminated with blood or body fluids.
- Don't shoot drugs. If you do shoot drugs, stop and get treatment.
- A prescription medication called PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) is available for those at higher risk of acquiring HIV.

## How is it treated?

People with HIV should take medicine to treat HIV as soon as possible. HIV medicine is called antiretroviral therapy. Post-exposure treatment taken within 72 hours of a possible exposure may prevent contraction of HIV.

If taken as prescribed, HIV medicine reduces the amount of HIV in the body (viral load) to a very low level, which keeps the immune system working and prevents illness. A person with HIV who takes HIV medicine as prescribed and gets and stays virally suppressed or undetectable can stay healthy and has effectively no risk of sexually transmitting HIV to HIV-negative partners.

*This fact sheet is for informational purposes only and is not intended for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).*

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