

Living in a world with HIV/AIDS

Can you tell if someone is HIV positive?

You cannot tell by looking! People often think that you can tell who is HIV positive by just looking at the person. A person with HIV does not have to be thin. Even a person who looks healthy can have HIV. People infected with the virus often look healthy for a long period of time. They can be infected with the virus for many years before they begin to look sick.

What can you do if someone you know is HIV positive?

The first thing you can do if someone you know is HIV positive is to be supportive. Don't blame them or make them feel they are less of a person than what they were before they became HIV positive. Keep in mind that anyone can have HIV. It is not something that just happens to other people, someone who is HIV positive can be your brother, sister, cousin or best friend. Help care for people with HIV because they need your support.

If I think I might be infected with HIV, what should I do first?

It is important that you discuss your situation with a qualified health professional, such as an HIV testing counsellor. He or she will privately listen to your concerns, answer your questions, and provide information to help you decide if you want to be tested.

How can I know if I have HIV?

The only way to know for sure whether you are HIV positive or negative is by going for an HIV test. The HIV test is a test for the antibodies that your body produces to fight the infection. When you go for an HIV test, a blood sample will be collected and tested to see if the antibodies are present.

However, you are always advised that after your first test, you should go back after 3 months for another test as it can take some time for antibodies to develop. If you are sexually active it's also a good idea to get routine tests every couple of months just to be safe. Although most people are afraid of taking the test, it's a good idea because if you test positive you can make responsible and wise choices about your future and if you are negative it will give you peace of mind as well as inspire you to adopt and maintain safe behaviour to stay negative.

How long can you live with HIV in your body before you know?

Many months and even years can pass before you know that you are HIV positive if you do not go for an HIV test.

Where can I go for an HIV test?

There are a lot of clinics and mini hospitals that offer Voluntary Counselling and Testing around the country. Check with your local clinic to find the nearest location.

At what age can you take an HIV test?

An HIV test is available for all ages.

What can you do if you have HIV?

You can start by talking to a doctor or health care professional about getting treatment to avoid getting illnesses caused by AIDS and see a trained counsellor to help you deal with the emotional and social problems you may experience as a result of your positive status.

There are many organisations that help people living with HIV, (look at the resources given at the end of this brochure). Contact them for advice on how to stay healthy and optimistic. The most important thing is not to let your status get you down. You are still an able bodied person who can achieve all your dreams.

Can you live a normal life after getting infected with HIV?

HIV positive people can still live normal lives just like any other human being. You can be very happy and healthy by living positively. You have to eat a healthy diet, do exercises to keep you strong and fit, get treated for infections right away, cut out cigarettes and alcohol, and always use a condom.

How can I best tell someone that I am HIV positive?

Telling a close friend or family member that you have HIV/AIDS takes courage. Before you tell anyone other than a health care provider, you need to feel emotionally stable about your HIV status. When you disclose your status be prepared to deal with the disbelief, fear, anger, accusations of betrayal or other emotional reactions from people you tell. But also remember that telling someone you love and trust will give you the support you need and help you live happier and healthier.

Who can I talk to if I need information and help on HIV matters?

You can visit Youth Friendly Health Centres and you will be attended to by trained and very friendly peer counsellors who can advise you on HIV and other health questions you may have. You can also talk to a nurse or doctor at a clinic or visit NGOs who work in the field of HIV/AIDS.

Frequently asked questions on HIV and AIDS



Transmission

How do you get HIV?

There are four ways that you can get infected with HIV.

1. By having sex with an infected person without using a condom. You can also get other sexually transmitted diseases like chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, and HIV, which can increase your chances of getting HIV.
2. From HIV-infected blood transfusions, blood products and transplanted organs, though the risk may be minimal as all blood donated is screened for HIV in Zambia.
3. Sharing sharp objects like razor blades and needles when piercing your ears or getting a tattoo or during drug use for example.
4. Mother to child transmission occurs when an HIV infected mother passes the virus on to her child in her womb, at birth, or during breast-feeding.

Can you get HIV from oral sex?

Oral sex can take place in different ways. The tongue of one partner can contact and stimulate the penis or vagina of the other partner. Semen or vaginal fluids can enter the mouth of the partner. It is possible to get HIV especially if you have sores or cuts in your mouth but the chances are slim. Oral sex can be safe if the man wears a condom over his penis and if the woman wears a protective film like dental dam over her vagina.

Can you get HIV/AIDS from kissing?

HIV has been detected in saliva in extremely low levels. You would have to drink a bathtub-full of it to cause any harm and even then, when you swallow it the acid

in the stomach would kill it. There may be a slight risk in deep kissing or tongue kissing but only if you and your partner have cuts or sores in the mouth but it is very unlikely. There is no risk from kissing on the cheek or with a closed mouth.

Can you get infected with HIV from masturbation?

Masturbation involves stimulating the penis or vagina by hand. This can be done alone or mutual masturbation between two partners. You cannot get HIV from self-masturbation because only you are involved. Mutual masturbation is also low risk, it is only risky if semen or vaginal fluid come into contact with sex organs of the other, or if the hand used to stimulate the other person's sexual organs has cuts or sores or is chapped.

Is it advisable for both partners to use condoms when having sex?

Using two or more condoms is not double protection, it is risky protection. It puts both you and your partner at risk of infection or unwanted pregnancy because when you use two condoms you might cause friction during the sex act and this might cause the condom to tear, break or even burst. Either the man should wear one male condom or the woman should wear one female condom.

How many unprotected sex acts does it take for a person to be infected with HIV?

It takes only one unprotected sex (sex without a condom) act to get infected with HIV/AIDS or an STI.

Can I get HIV from a mosquito bite?

No you cannot get HIV from being bitten by a mosquito. If you could get HIV from mosquitoes then everyone would have it.

Can you get HIV by using a shaving machine from a barber shop?

It is said that the virus can not survive in heat, but if a shaving machine is used on someone who is infected with HIV, cuts him and it is immediately used on you without being sterilized it may be risky and you could get infected. The best way to stay safe is to insist that the shaving machine be sterilized before it is used on you.

Can you get HIV by sharing cups and spoons with an HIV positive person?

No. Skin forms a natural barrier to HIV so it can only enter where the skin is more delicate, like the vagina or where the skin is broken like where there is a cut or a sore. You can't get HIV from shaking hands, hugging, toilet seats, sharing towels or coughing.

Can you get HIV through sweat?

No. HIV does not live or grow in human sweat.

Is it true that when you have sex without a condom and immediately wash your vagina/penis with spirit or JIK, you cannot get HIV?

Having sex standing, sitting, upside down or washing yourself with spirit or JIK will not protect you from getting infected with HIV. As long as you had sex without a condom, you are at risk of infection.

Can you get HIV if you have sex during your periods?

Yes, you can become infected with HIV any time you have unprotected sexual intercourse – even during your periods.

Is it true that HIV is so small that it can pass through the condom?

No it is not true. The virus is small, but with a condom that has been produced by a known manufacturing company and has been kept in the proper conditions (such as in cool dark places) and used properly (careful opening, as well as not using a condom past its expiry date and using a water based lubricant if necessary), the virus cannot pass through. Many people have argued that the condom does not work properly and say sometimes it fails but this is not accurate. The actual condom is not a faulty device but often they are not used correctly which can result in breakage or problems.

Can anyone get HIV?

Yes, HIV does not care about race, colour, religion or how poor or rich you are.

The Progression of HIV to AIDS

How and when does HIV change to AIDS?

There are three stages of disease progression:

1. Window period. During this stage, immediately after being infected with HIV, the body starts producing antibodies to fight the infection. During the first few weeks after you are infected, there is a lot of HIV in your body

and you can easily infect anyone you have unprotected sex with at this time. It can take 2 to 24 weeks before the immune system produces these antibodies.

2. Asymptomatic period. During this stage the body is trying to fight back the HIV virus. There are no evident signs or symptoms of HIV infection. A person can be in the asymptomatic phase for a period of time ranging from approximately 2 to 10 years before developing any symptoms.
3. Symptomatic period (AIDS). At this stage the body's immune system is very weak after so many years of fighting off HIV and becomes open to opportunistic infections like flu, pneumonia, tuberculosis and sometimes a rare form of skin cancer called Kaposi's Sarcoma.

REMEMBER, even if an HIV positive person is not displaying any symptoms, he/she still carries the virus and can infect others. This is especially true in the newly infected stage.

Is a person suffering from TB also HIV positive?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease that is often associated with HIV/AIDS because it can take advantage of a weak immune system. It is also a common cause of death in people with AIDS. However, having TB does not necessarily mean that you have HIV. Anyone who has a weak immune system due to stress or a prolonged illness can have TB as well as be vulnerable to many other illnesses. We all have TB germs in our bodies; except that our immune systems are healthy enough to keep them at bay. The only way to know if a person is HIV positive is to take an HIV test.

Is it true that some traditional healers can cure HIV?

No. At the moment there is no cure for HIV. You can protect yourself from HIV by not having sex at all (abstaining) or using a condom correctly each and every time you have sex. If you are already HIV positive, you must make sure you try your best to keep healthy.

Prevention

How can you protect yourself from getting infected if you are sexually active?

The only way you can protect yourself from getting infected if you are sexually active is by using a condom correctly and consistently every time you have sex.

How can you protect yourself from getting infected when you are in a steady relationship or are married?

Mutual faithfulness is one way. You have to make sure that you remain faithful to your sexual partner and your partner remains faithful to you. Of course you both should also be tested for HIV. The other option is that you and your partner use condoms every time you have sex.

Does using the withdrawal method or using contraceptives like the Pill protect against HIV infection?

No. Using the withdrawal method or using any other contraceptive method except condoms does not protect against HIV infection.