Facts you should know about HIV and AIDS

Get the facts about HIV & AIDS.

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS, a disease that destroys the body's ability to fight off infections.

- There is no cure for HIV or AIDS.
- AIDS can be fatal.
- People become infected with HIV because of what they do, not who they are.
- There are only a few ways you can become infected with HIV.
- You can protect yourself from becoming infected with HIV.
- An HIV test can show if you have been infected. The test is confidential.
- If you are infected with HIV, there are things you can do to stay healthy.

What are HIV and AIDS?

HIV (or Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is the virus that causes AIDS (or Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). HIV damages the immune system, the part of the body that fights infection. Eventually, the immune system becomes so weak that diseases and infections begin to attack the body. As these conditions worsen, a person is diagnosed with AIDS.

How can you tell if someone is infected with HIV?

You cannot tell if someone has HIV or AIDS by looking at them. A person infected with HIV may look healthy and feel fine, but they can still pass the virus to you. An HIV antibody test is the way a person can find out if he or she is infected with HIV.

Anyone can become infected with HIV. It has nothing to do with race, age, religion, nationality or sexual orientation. People get infected with HIV because of what they do, not who they are.

How do you get infected with HIV?

HIV is spread through blood, semen, vaginal secretions and breast milk. Contact with these body fluids puts you at risk for HIV infection.

The most common ways people are infected with HIV are:

- Having sex (anal, vaginal or oral), with someone who is infected with HIV.
- Sharing needles or syringes with someone who is infected. This includes sharing needles to shoot drugs or vitamins, to pierce body parts, or for tattoos.
- A woman with HIV can pass the virus to her baby during pregnancy or birth.
- A few babies have been infected by breastfeeding from their infected mother.
- Although all donated blood has been screened for HIV since 1985, some people got the virus by receiving HIV-infected blood products between 1978 and 1985. You cannot get HIV by giving blood.

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How you WON'T get infected.

You cannot get HIV through the air or from casual contact. HIV is not spread by:

- Living, working or going to school with someone with HIV infection
- Shaking hands, hugging or kissing
- Sneezing or coughing
- Sharing food, plates, cups or forks
- Toilets, tubs or swimming pools
- Mosquitoes or other insects

How can you avoid HIV infection?

- **Don't have sex.** This is the only sure way to avoid getting HIV through sex.
- **Don't share needles** and syringes to shoot drugs or for anything else.
- **Use a latex condom** every time you have sex unless you are sure your partner is not infected. When used correctly, condoms can help prevent HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.
- **Stay with one partner** who has sex only with you. Use condoms unless you are sure your partner is not infected with HIV.

Should you get an HIV test?

You should get tested for HIV if you have:

- Had sex without a condom (anal, vaginal or oral) with someone whose HIV status you do not know – even if that person is your boyfriend, girlfriend or spouse
- Shared needles, syringes or works
- Had multiple sex partners, male or female (the more partners you have, the greater your risk)
- Been diagnosed with – or treated for – hepatitis, tuberculosis or any sexually transmitted disease (STD)
- Exchanged sex for money, drugs or other goods
- Received blood products between 1978 and 1985
- Had sex – even once – with anyone who has done any of these things

Why should you take the test?

If you are infected with HIV, there are things you can do to stay healthy longer. Research shows that early treatment can help delay the onset of AIDS. You can also take steps to avoid infecting other people with HIV. If you are pregnant and infected with HIV, there are medicines you can take to reduce your baby's risk of getting HIV.

For HIV/STD testing locations in Texas, call: 2-1-1

For other HIV/STD questions, call:
1 (800) CDC-INFO (English/Español)
1 (888) 232-6348 (TTY)

For more information, go to: www.dshs.state.tx.us/hivstd

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