



HIV / AIDS

(Human Immunodeficiency Virus /
Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome)

What is HIV?

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is virus that can lead to the disease AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). It is estimated that 36.9 million people live with HIV/AIDS.

There is currently no cure for HIV/AIDS.

The HIV virus attacks the immune system, hindering a person's ability to fight off "opportunistic" infections and diseases, which take advantage of the weakened immune system.

HIV is a reportable infection. If you test positive, a local health authority may contact you for the contact information of current and past sexual partners for notification and testing. They can offer assistance in contacting past sexual partners and your information is kept private.

HIV Infections Advance in Stages:

1. Incubation period:
 - 2 to 4 weeks after exposure
 - infected individuals usually asymptomatic (experiencing no symptoms)
2. Acute Infection:
 - Up to 3 months
 - Flu-like symptoms
3. Latency stage:
 - 2 weeks to 20 years – typically develops over time (median average is 9 years without antiretroviral medications)
 - few or no symptoms
4. AIDS:
 - Late-stage infection

Characterized by:

- Extremely low T-cell count (cells that help in fighting off infections)
- HIV-positive individual experiences opportunistic infection, i.e. unusual pneumonia or cancers
 - Median duration is 9 months before death from AIDS

How is HIV Transmitted?

HIV is transmitted through five body fluids; blood, semen, pre-ejaculate (“pre-cum”), vaginal fluids and breast milk.

There is NO known transmission via saliva, sweat and tears.

Main methods of transmission are:

- Unprotected sex (vaginal, anal or oral, plus genital to genital contact)
 - This includes sharing sex toys
 - Needles or other injecting equipment
- Parent to baby – during pregnancy, at birth or breastfeeding

There is also low risk when sharing personal items that may have blood on them, such as toothbrushes, razors, and tools used to ingest drugs.

Touching, hugging and shaking hands do NOT transmit HIV.

What Are the Symptoms of HIV?

Two to four weeks after exposure, some individuals experience flu-like symptoms, which disappear.

For most people, symptoms of HIV infection do not appear for years after contracting the virus.

Symptoms can include:

- Frequent fevers or sweats
 - Joint or muscle pain
 - Persistent skin rashes
 - Swollen glands
 - Sore throat
 - Lack of energy
 - Headaches
- Rapid, unexplained weight loss
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea

How Will the Doctor Know I Have HIV?

A simple blood test can confirm whether you have antibodies against HIV.

If positive, HIV antibodies will be present in the blood sample.

It can take up to 12 weeks after exposure for HIV antibodies to appear in a blood test. So, people often must wait 3 months before testing. If you are at high risk for contracting HIV, a second test within 3 months after an initial negative result is strongly recommended.

If you have questions about HIV testing, you can contact your doctor, a local health authority, or the Newfoundland and Labrador AIDS Committee at (709) 579-8656 or (1-800-563-1575).

What Should I Do if I Test Positive for HIV?

Make appointment with doctor to discuss treatment options.

There is no cure for HIV at the present. However, there are several treatment options that focus on controlling the virus and its symptoms, which could lower your viral load to be *undetectable*. Once it is undetectable it is *untransmissible*. However, for your viral load to remain low, you must take your medication on a daily basis (U=U).

Anti-retroviral therapy (ART)

Combinations of anti-retroviral drugs are taken by infected persons which:

- Help to slow progress of the virus
- Help boost the immune system
- ART is usually started when T-cell count is 350 or less.
- While ART can slow the development of the infection, there may be side-effects that affect quality of life.
- Patients using ART are monitored closely by a specialist for response to the treatment.

If you test positive for HIV, your current and past sexual partners should be tested immediately. Tell your current sexual partner(s) about your diagnosis and let your partner know what their risks are. If you are uncomfortable or unsure how to tell sexual partner(s), a doctor or nurse can help.

If you are HIV-positive, you **must** take precautions to avoid passing the virus to another person.

What Complications Are Associated With HIV?

Once the infection has advanced to AIDS, other health issues may occur.

Infections

- Pneumocystis jirovecii
- Cytomegalovirus (CMV) – causes loss of vision
- Candidiasis (fungal) – affects esophagus, lungs, vagina

Cancers

- Cervical
- Anal
- Kaposi sarcoma (tumor caused by Human Herpes Virus 8)
- Lymphoma

Increased severity of Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV) outbreaks

Chronic intestinal disturbances

Having one STI can increase your risk of getting HIV from an HIV-infected individual or giving HIV to someone.

How Can I Protect Myself from Receiving HIV?

When you have (a) new partner(s), both/all of you should be tested for all STIs.

Do not share items that could result in an exchange of body fluids i.e. injection, piercing, tattoo equipment, sex toys, toothbrushes, razors.

Discuss HIV and the risks with your sexual partner(s).

You will never be 100% protected from HIV when engaging in sex, but proper and consistent use of safer sex practices can help to protect you from HIV.

Here are some tips:

Vaginal Sex (including sex toys):

Use a latex external (penis) condom, OR an internal (vaginal) condom. *Note: non-latex external condoms have higher incidence of breakage, and unknown effectiveness against STIs*

Oral Sex:

Oral/Penis: Use a non-lubricated latex condom OR flavoured condom

Oral/Vaginal: Use a latex dental dam

Oral/Anal: Use a latex dental dam

DIY: Dental dams can be made from an unrolled latex external condom (non-lubricated or flavoured).

Snip off the tip of the condom and then cut up one side and unroll. *See our pamphlet for more information.*

Anal sex (including sex toys):

Use a latex external condom

Mutual Masturbation:

Wash your hands after masturbating your partner(s) and before touching your own mouth and/or genital area.

If you would like further information on STIs, testing and/or safer sex practices, please feel free to drop by our Centre or contact us by phone or email.

Sexual Health Questions? We Have Answers!

Location:

47 St. Clare Avenue, St. John's, NL, A1C 2J9

Hours:

Monday: 9am - 4:30pm

Tuesday: 9am - 4:30pm

Wednesday: 9am - 4:30pm

Thursday: 12pm – 6:00pm

Friday: 9am - 4:30pm

Phone:

579-1009

Toll Free: 1-877-NO MYTHS
(1-877-666-9847)

Website:

www.plannedparenthoodnlshc.com

Email:pp.nlshc@gmail.com

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