

HIV/AIDS

What causes it?

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus).

How do I get it?

- unprotected vaginal or anal sex resulting in exposure to infected semen, vaginal secretions or blood, with greater risk if you have open sores, lesions, cuts, inflamed or bleeding membranes, or other STIs
- spread of infection through unprotected oral sex is possible, but less likely
- blood to blood contact: shared needles, drug works, sex toys, or personal items like toothbrushes or razors that have infected blood on them
- transmission from an infected mother to the fetus during pregnancy, or the baby at the time of delivery or while breast-feeding: medication is available to help reduce this risk

HIV is NOT spread by casual every-day contact like hugging, shaking hands, coughing, sneezing, or kissing.

What are the symptoms?

You can be HIV positive but not have AIDS anywhere from a few years up to 10 years or longer after exposure. You usually have no symptoms during this period although the virus may be active and harming your immune system.

If you are HIV positive:

- you may have mild to severe flu-like symptoms soon after you are infected
- as the virus weakens your immune system, the next stage lasting from 1 to 5 years or more may have symptoms such as:
 - fevers, coughs, colds
 - tiredness
 - weight loss
 - rash
 - diarrhea
 - night sweats
 - yeast or other infections
 - swollen glands

AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) is the disease caused by prolonged HIV infection. If you have been HIV positive for some time and are diagnosed with AIDS, you may have one or more infections other than HIV that your body can no longer fight off or other complications related to AIDS (see next page).

How do you test for it?

- blood test to see if you have an HIV infection: it can be up to 3 to 6 months after exposure to the virus before the test is positive
- testing is confidential: only your doctor, nurse or clinic has a record of your test results linked to your name and no one else can see your medical records without your permission
- you can get an anonymous test: you can choose nominal (using your name) or non-nominal (using your initials and birth date)

What treatment is available?

- your health care provider will offer counselling before and after the blood test
- there is no cure yet for HIV but prescription anti-viral medicine can reduce the harmful effects of HIV and slow down the progress of the disease
- get plenty of sleep, eat a healthy diet, cut down or stop smoking, and don't drink alcohol

- since you will need additional tests, further medical assessments and vaccination for other diseases, it's important to have a doctor who will coordinate your care

What complications can happen?

With AIDS, you become vulnerable to several health problems:

- severe or persistent infections like pneumonia and tuberculosis
- unusual cancers like Kaposi Sarcoma and lymphomas
- problems of the nervous system

AIDS can still be fatal but drugs are now available that reduce the damage to the immune system, delay symptoms, and prolong life.

What precautions should I take if I am HIV positive or have AIDS?

If you may have been exposed to the virus, are HIV positive, or have AIDS, take precautions to prevent infecting others:

- practice safer sex: always use latex condoms
- let your sexual partner know your condition so that he/she can decide how much risk he/she wants to take
- contact your past sexual partners or people you've shared needles with so that they can be tested
- avoid blood to blood contact:
- don't share needles, syringes or drug works
- don't share toothbrushes, razors, or sex toys
- clean up blood spills with bleach
- dispose of used condoms or injection needles carefully
- don't donate blood, organs or tissues
- talk to your doctor before becoming pregnant
- advise your health or dental care provider that you are HIV positive before they have any contact with your blood or body fluids

If you have questions about which contacts are safe, ask your health care provider.

What else do I need to know?

There is no vaccine yet to prevent AIDS.

Where can I get tested?

You can get tested at:

- YCDC (Yukon Communicable Disease Control)
#4 Hospital Road
667-8323 or 1-800-661-0408 ext. 8323
- Community Health Centre
- [Medical Clinics](#)
- Blood Ties Four Directions Centre Drop-in and Street Clinic
Drop-in Clinic is Wednesday's 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.
307 Strickland Street, Whitehorse
633-2437 or 1-877-333-2437