

# HIV/AIDS

## Your questions answered



## What is HIV?

**HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. HIV causes AIDS.**

## What is AIDS?

**AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.**

*Acquired* means not inherited.

*Immune Deficiency* means a breakdown in the body's immune system.

*Syndrome* refers to a range of diseases that may be associated with another disease. In this case, diseases that take advantage of the body's weakened immune system are used to define the onset of AIDS.

## How do you get HIV?

HIV can be spread by:

- **Unprotected vaginal or anal sex with someone who has HIV.**
- **Sharing injecting equipment and needles with someone who has HIV.**
- **From a mother who has HIV to a child during pregnancy, birth, or via breastfeeding.**
- **Unprotected oral sex with someone who has HIV, however this is less common.**

In Australia, HIV is most commonly spread by sexual intercourse without a condom, and through sharing of needles, syringes and other injecting equipment.

## Can I get HIV from saliva, animals, toilets, insects, shaking hands, crockery, swimming pools and so on?

**There is no evidence available to suggest that HIV is spread in any of these ways.**

HIV cannot be spread through ordinary social or family contact such as hugging, shaking hands, sharing household items, toilet seats, swimming pools or pets.

HIV does not live long outside of the body. It can be killed by ordinary household bleach, or soap and warm water.

## What is safe sex?

**Safe sex is sex where semen, vaginal secretions or blood are not exchanged between sexual partners.**

Using condoms properly during intercourse (anal and vaginal) will greatly reduce the risk of spreading HIV. Condoms must be used correctly and with plenty of lubricant. Water based lubricant should be used as other types of lubricants will cause condoms to break. Female condoms are also available and should also be used with lubricants.

Safe sexual activities include mutual masturbation, touching, cuddling, body-to-body rubbing, and erotic massage.

HIV can be spread by unprotected anal or vaginal sex with someone who has HIV. Safe sex is recommended if either partner has HIV or if either partner is unsure of whether they have HIV. Other sexually transmissible infections (STIs), e.g. herpes, chlamydia, gonorrhoea, can be also spread by unprotected sex. If either partner has an STI or if either partner is unsure of whether they have an STI, safe sex is also recommended.

## Can I get HIV from oral sex?

**Unprotected oral sex is low risk for spreading HIV but using a condom is recommended.**

It is advisable to use a condom, or avoid ejaculation into the mouth, when:

- either partner has ulcers or bleeding gums; or
- has just brushed or flossed their teeth.

Also, condom use may prevent the spread of other STIs, such as herpes, chlamydia and gonorrhoea. These STIs may be spread more easily by unprotected oral sex.

## Is deep kissing a way of spreading HIV?

There are only very small amounts of HIV found in the saliva of people who have HIV. For you to get HIV, a lot of saliva would need to get into your blood via ulcers or bleeding gums. Deep kissing is an extremely low risk behaviour for spreading HIV.

## What is the risk of catching HIV from having a blood transfusion in hospital?

**Since May 1985, all blood donations in Australia have been tested for HIV. This means that blood transfusions in this country are now an extremely low risk for HIV.**

## Can I get HIV when donating blood?

**No. In Australia needles, packs, swabs, finger-pricking lancets and so on are never re-used.**

## What are the symptoms of HIV?

**Symptoms of HIV are common to a number of illnesses. If you think you have been put at risk of getting HIV or if you have any of the signs below (or any combination of them) for a month or longer, you should consult your doctor.**

Some of the more common symptoms of HIV-related illnesses are:

- Flu-like symptoms
- Extreme and constant tiredness.
- Fevers, chills and night sweats.
- Rapid weight loss for no known reason.
- Swollen lymph glands in the neck, underarm or groin area.
- White spots or unusual marks in the mouth.
- Skin marks or bumps (raised or flat, usually painless and purplish).
- Continuous coughing or a dry cough.
- Diarrhoea.
- Decreased appetite.

Someone who has HIV may not have any symptoms, but they carry the virus and could pass it on through blood or body fluids (e.g. unprotected sexual intercourse).

## Can I get tested for HIV?

### **Yes. Blood tests can detect HIV infection.**

If you think that you may have been exposed to HIV, see your doctor or visit one of the services listed at the end of this brochure.

If HIV infection is found in a person's blood then this person is said to be HIV positive.

There is a short period just after a person is infected by HIV when the virus cannot be detected. This may require a follow-up test three months later.

All people who request an HIV test must receive pre- and post-test counselling.

## What does an HIV test involve?

- **Testing should be voluntary and only carried out with informed consent, except in exceptional circumstances.**
- **Information should be provided about what is involved in the test.**
- **Information and discussion should take place about what it means to get tested.**
- **Post-test counselling.**

Post-test counselling is important regardless of the outcome of the test. If the test is positive, post-test counselling can provide emotional support, further information about the disease and referral to the support services available. If the test is negative, post-test counselling can provide education about HIV and how a person can avoid getting HIV.

## How is AIDS different from HIV?

### **HIV causes AIDS.**

Someone who has HIV may not have AIDS. HIV weakens the body's immune system, leaving it open to various infections and cancers.

For most people who have HIV, the progression to AIDS is fairly slow, taking several years from HIV infection to the development of AIDS. Without treatment, people who have HIV eventually become ill and can develop AIDS within 5-10 years. However there are a small percentage of people who do not show any deterioration in their health, even after 10 years.

AIDS diagnosis may require a number of special laboratory tests to be performed.

## Can HIV/AIDS be cured or treated?

**Currently, there is no vaccine or cure for HIV or AIDS. However, there are drug treatments available that work against HIV.**

For the majority of people, these drugs can postpone, and possibly prevent, HIV-related illnesses and delay moving on to AIDS. These drugs are not easy to take because of the side effects and difficult courses of treatment. It should be noted that once someone begins drug treatments for HIV, they should continue to take them for life.

There are also treatments for many of the specific illnesses associated with HIV and AIDS.

Complementary therapies are also used by people who have HIV to manage the side effects of drug treatment and improve health and wellbeing.

New drugs and therapies are being trialled all the time.

## What is the government doing about HIV/AIDS?

The Commonwealth and State Governments work with community-based organisations, medical professionals and research organisations to reduce the spread of HIV and reduce the personal and social impacts of HIV/AIDS.

The Victorian Government's policy document on HIV/AIDS, *Victorian HIV/AIDS Strategy 2002–2004*, can be downloaded from the Department of Human Services Web site at: [www.dhs.vic.gov.au/phd/publications.htm](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/phd/publications.htm)

## Where can I get further information or help?

### **Melbourne Sexual Health Centre**

580 Swanston Street

Carlton 3053

Telephone: (03) 9347 0244

TTY for deaf callers: (03) 9347 8619

Enquires from rural Victoria: Freecall 1800 032 017

All services at the Centre are completely free and confidential.

Staff can give you up-to-date advice on the phone, make an appointment to see you, or give you a referral to doctors in your area who are able to help you.

## Statewide services and contacts

### **AIDSLINE**

Telephone counselling service offering advice on HIV/AIDS, STIs and sexual health.

Telephone: (03) 9347 6099

Country freecall: 1800 133 392

TTY: 1800 032 665

### **Victoria AIDS Council/Gay Men's Health Centre**

6 Claremont Street

South Yarra 3141

Telephone: (03) 9865 6700

TTY: (03) 9827 3733

Freecall: 1800 134 840

Email: [enquiries@vic aids.asn.au](mailto:enquiries@vic aids.asn.au)

Website: [www.vic aids.asn.au](http://www.vic aids.asn.au)

### **Access Information Centre at The Alfred**

Commercial Road

Prahran 3181

Telephone: (03) 9276 6993

Email: [access@alfred.org.au](mailto:access@alfred.org.au)

Website: [www.accessinfo.org.au](http://www.accessinfo.org.au)

### **The Centre Clinic**

#### **C/- Northcote Community Health Centre**

42 Separation Street

Northcote 3070

Telephone: (03) 9481 7155

Also located at:

#### **The Centre Clinic (St Kilda)**

Rear 77 Fitzroy Street

St Kilda 3182

Telephone: (03) 9525 5866

**Family Planning Victoria**

901 Whitehorse Road

Box Hill 3128

Clinic and Education

Telephone: (03) 9257 0100

Email: [fpv@fpv.org.au](mailto:fpv@fpv.org.au)

**Action Centre (for Youth)**

277 Flinders Lane

Melbourne 3000

Clinic and Education

Telephone: (03) 9654 4766

Freecall: 1800 013 952

## Rural STI clinics

### **The Annexe Sexual Health Clinic**

#### **Ballarat Community Health Centre**

710 Sturt Street

Ballarat 3350

Telephone: (03) 5333 1635

### **STD Clinic – Community Health Bendigo**

Seymoure Street

Eaglehawk 3556

Telephone: (03) 5434 4330

### **Geelong Sexual Health Clinic**

Swanston Street entrance

Eastern Annexe

Geelong Hospital

Geelong 3220

Open Tuesdays 2–7pm

Telephone: (03) 5221 4735

### **STD Clinic – Vermont Street Clinic**

Wodonga Regional Health Service

79 Vermont Street

Wodonga 3690

Open Tuesdays and Thursdays

Telephone: (03) 6051 7470

### **STD Clinic – Latrobe Regional Hospital (Outpatient Department)**

Cnr Princes Highway & Village Way

Traralgon 3844

Telephone: (03) 5173 8000

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