

## **General HIV/AIDS Information**

### **What is HIV/AIDS?**

The human immunodeficiency virus, or HIV, is the virus that causes HIV infection. During the HIV infection, the virus attacks and destroys the infection-fighting CD4 cells of the body's immune system. Loss of CD4 cells makes it difficult for the immune system to fight off infections.

Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, or AIDS, is the most advanced stage of HIV infection and are at risk or opportunistic infections.

### **How do you get HIV/AIDS?**

HIV is transmitted from and infected person to another via bodily fluids:

- Blood
- Breast Milk
- Vaginal Fluids
- Semen
- Pre-seminal fluid (precum)

A person can come in contact with contaminated bodily fluids through

- Oral, anal or vaginal sex
- Unclean needles that may be shared for drugs, steroids, body modifications etc.
- Occupational Exposure ei: Healthcare Workers and Police
- Mothers exposing children during childbirth and breast-feeding.

### **Are there symptoms that I have been infected with HIV?**

Many people who are HIV-positive do not have symptoms that they are infected. Some people within the first 3 months experience acute retroviral syndrome (ARS). It presents itself as a severe case of the flu. Once people have progressed to the point of AIDS they can be affected by nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, night sweats, fatigue and fever.

### **How do I find out if I have been exposed to HIV?**

Everyone needs to get tested for HIV. Please go to [HIVLA.org](http://HIVLA.org) to find your nearest testing location.

### **What types of HIV tests are available?**

Antibody tests looks for the HIC antibodies your body has created to defend itself from the virus.

- Enzyme immunoassay (EIA) tests use blood, oral fluid, or urine to detect HIV antibodies. Results for these tests can take up to two weeks.
- Rapid HIV antibody tests also use blood, oral fluid, or urine to detect HIV antibodies. Results for these tests can take 10–20 minutes.

- Home testing kits are HIV antibody tests that you can take in the privacy of your own home. OraQuick made by OraSure Technologies is an oral in-home HIV testing kit. The test requires no blood you will have the results in 20 minutes. It can be purchased over the counter at a store near you.

Antigen tests require a blood sample and can detect and HIV infection 1-3 weeks after exposure.

PCR Test (Polymerase chain reaction test)

This test detects the genetic material of HIV itself, and can identify HIV in the blood within 2-3 weeks of infection.

Babies born to HIV-positive mothers are tested with a special PCR test, because their blood contains their mother's HIV antibodies for several months. This means they would test HIV-positive on a standard antibody test—but a PCR test can determine whether the babies have HIV themselves.

## **Is HIV manageable?**

HIV medications and treatments have significantly changed the course of HIV infection since the early days of the epidemic. With daily medication, regular laboratory monitoring, and lifestyle changes (e.g., exercise, adequate sleep, smoking cessation), HIV can be manageable as a chronic disease. People living with HIV can enjoy healthy lives.

However there are some significant differences between HIV and chronic diseases, such as diabetes, asthma, or hypertension (high blood pressure):

- HIV is an infectious disease. Unlike many other chronic illnesses, you can spread HIV to your sexual partners, your unborn fetus (if you are an HIV-positive woman), and others. But proper medical treatment, monitoring, and prevention practices can significantly reduce the risk of infection.
- HIV remains a highly stigmatized disease. Stigma can place burdens and create barriers to people seeking treatment or counseling for HIV disease. These barriers can affect treatment, medication adherence, and disclosure.
- HIV medications (antiretrovirals) can have significant side effects—more so than common antihypertensives, asthma medications, or diabetes medications. For more information, see NIH's [Treatment of HIV Infection](http://www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/hiv/aids/understanding/treatment/pages/default.aspx) [www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/hiv/aids/understanding/treatment/pages/default.aspx](http://www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/hiv/aids/understanding/treatment/pages/default.aspx)

## **Fact Sheets & Print Materials**

- AIDSinfo – [HIV And Its Treatment: What You Should Know](http://aidsinfo.nih.gov/contentfiles/HIVandItsTreatment_cbrochure_en.pdf) (PDF)  
[http://aidsinfo.nih.gov/contentfiles/HIVandItsTreatment\\_cbrochure\\_en.pdf](http://aidsinfo.nih.gov/contentfiles/HIVandItsTreatment_cbrochure_en.pdf)
- National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases – [HIV/AIDS](http://www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/hiv/aids/understanding/Pages/Default.aspx)  
<http://www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/hiv/aids/understanding/Pages/Default.aspx>
- CDC – [Rapid HIV Testing](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/testing/rapid/index.htm#overview)  
<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/testing/rapid/index.htm#overview>

## **Additional Resources**

- CDC - [Basic Information About HIV/AIDS](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/basic/index.htm#aids)  
<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/basic/index.htm#aids>
- NIH - [Researchers Recall The Early Years of AIDS \(Timeline\)](http://history.nih.gov/NIHInOwnWords/)  
<http://history.nih.gov/NIHInOwnWords/>
- NIH - [The Evidence That HIV Causes AIDS](http://www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/HIVAIDS/Understanding/howHIVCausesAIDS/pages/hivcausesaids.aspx)  
[www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/HIVAIDS/Understanding/howHIVCausesAIDS/pages/hivcausesaids.aspx](http://www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/HIVAIDS/Understanding/howHIVCausesAIDS/pages/hivcausesaids.aspx)
- FDA - [HIV Timeline/History](http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ByAudience/ForPatientAdvocates/HIVandAIDSactivities/ucm117935.htm)  
<http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ByAudience/ForPatientAdvocates/HIVandAIDSactivities/ucm117935.htm>
- AIDSinfo - [Glossary](http://aidsinfo.nih.gov/education-materials/glossary)  
<http://aidsinfo.nih.gov/education-materials/glossary>