

HIV AND HER





OVERVIEW

WHAT IS HIV?



Human Immunodeficiency Virus, otherwise known as HIV, attacks and weakens the immune system over time. As the virus grows, receiving treatment is important because the body is at risk for other infections.

HOW IS IT TRANSMITTED?

HIV is transmitted through bodily fluids such as blood, semen, rectal fluids, vaginal fluids or even breast milk. The most common way to transmit the virus is through unprotected sexual intercourse (vaginal or anal) or sharing needles, syringes or other drug equipment.



WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Often, people do not realize they have been exposed to the virus because it can be asymptomatic. Since initial symptoms are flu-like and can subside after a few weeks, the virus can sometimes be left unfound and not tested for.

It is a myth that homosexual men are the only ones at risk for HIV. HIV cannot be detected by looking at someone. Knowing your status comes from testing. Anyone partaking in activities that transmit bodily fluids is at risk. This means that women and men are both at risk of contracting the virus. **Therefore, women should also get tested.**





KNOW YOUR STATUS

GETTING TESTED FOR HIV

Girls and women between the ages of 13-64 should be tested at least once. These tests can be performed by your gynecologist or primary health care provider. Providers within the Take Control HIV community offer free HIV testing, as do many clinics, hospitals and other testing locations.

You can take control of how you want to be tested. Various tests are available to help you learn your status and seek treatment if necessary.



TYPES OF HIV TESTS INCLUDE:

- **Antibody Tests**, such as Enzymes Linked Immunosorbent Assay (ELISA) and home tests, are the most common test conducted and examines a person's blood for HIV antibodies.
- **Antibody-antigen Test** detects antibodies and antigens in the blood. The antigens p24 are produced before HIV antibodies develop. Medical professionals use the Western Blot Test to confirm ELISA tests and assess antigen count.
- **Nucleic Acid Tests (NAT)** assess the viral load of HIV in your system. It is the most expensive test and is mainly used for individuals who have had a high-risk exposure to HIV and obtain quick results.



WHAT DOES YOUR RESULT MEAN?



The result of a **positive test** indicates that you are infected with HIV, whereas a **negative test** means that you have not been exposed to the virus.



Coping with a Positive Result

Now that you have tested positive for HIV, what do you do? With the advancement of HIV treatments and medication, you can live a long and healthy life without fear of becoming more ill or transmitting the disease. This will be an emotional time for you and the people close to you, but **you will get through it.**



Here are some helpful steps to cope with this positive result.

- 1** **There is no right or wrong response** to a positive HIV result. Do not repress your feelings, allow yourself to embrace them.
- 2** **Schedule a visit with your healthcare provider** as they will be able to assist you with the next steps.
- 3** **Talk to someone.** Whether you have a trusted family, friend or support group, you do not have to go through this alone.
- 4** **Call 1-800-662-6080** for help in finding testing centers, treatment and support groups.



THE INITIAL VISIT AFTER A POSITIVE RESULT

The first visit after a positive result will include further testing. The provider will review your medical history and perform a physical exam and several lab tests such as:

CD4 count is a blood test to measure the white blood cells that HIV attacks.

- **Person without HIV –**
500 – 1,600 cells/mm³
- **Immune system compromised –**
250 – 500 cells/mm³
- **AIDs diagnosis –**
under 200 cell/mm³

A ***Viral Load test*** measures the number of HIV particles in a milliliter of blood.

- **High viral load –**
100,000 copies/mL
- **Lower viral load –**
below 10,000 copies/mL
- **Undetectable viral load –**
below 20 copies/mL

Here are some questions you should ask your healthcare provider:

- How can I prevent HIV from turning into AIDS?
- What can I do to prevent other infections?
- How can I prevent passing HIV to others?
- What treatment/medications are available to keep me healthy?
- How will HIV treatment affect my lifestyle? Dating? Ability to have children?
- How should I tell my partner(s) that I have HIV?
- Are there support groups for people with HIV?
- Are there resources available to help me pay for my HIV medication?



FAQs

About Dating with A Positive Status

It is normal to think that HIV can limit dating, sexual intercourse or the ability to find a partner. You can still date and have a healthy sex life.

Can I still have sex?

Yes! Take your treatment as prescribed by your healthcare provider to lower your levels of HIV. Condoms and dental dams can also reduce the risk of transmitting the virus during sex.

How often should I get tested if I have sex with someone who has a positive status?

It is best to get tested every three to six months if engaging in sexual activity with someone who is HIV positive.

Is there a risk of transmission of HIV through sexual interactions between two females?

Although rare, HIV transmission can happen in women who engage in sex with other women. It occurs through sharing of sex toys, oral sex and exposure to blood during sex.



CAN I STILL

HAVE SEX?

YES.

Is it more likely to get HIV through female to male transmission?

Yes, most women get HIV from having sex with a man. Women are more likely than men to get HIV during vaginal sex.

How can I protect myself?

You can protect yourself by practicing safe sex and limiting the transmission of bodily fluids. It is also important to be honest with your partners and keep up to date with testing. *If you are HIV positive*, take your medications and keep up to date with doctor visits. Once your viral load is undetectable, you cannot pass the virus to others.

Is there an online dating website I can use?

People living with HIV can use any dating site, but sites are available to connect with other HIV+ individuals. These sites include Positive Singles, PozMAch, POZ Personals, HIVPEOPLEMEET and many more!



FAQs

about Motherhood and HIV

HIV should not stop you from becoming a mother or giving birth to a biological child, should you desire. It is essential to keep up with your gynecology appointments to reduce the risk of other infections and abnormalities that can affect your ability to conceive

Commonly asked questions include:



Is it safe to get pregnant?

Yes, there are many ways to lower the risk of passing the virus to the baby. All pregnant women should be tested for HIV and seek treatment to prevent transmission to their babies.

I'm negative, but my partner is HIV positive, can he father my child?

Yes, there are medications available to minimize the risk of the mother contracting the virus during conception.

What infections and abnormalities can affect my ability to conceive?

Since HIV attacks the immune system, you are at risk for other infections such as

HPV, yeast infections, bacterial vaginosis, genital ulcers, pelvic inflammatory disease and menstrual abnormalities.

Can I have a normal birth?

During birth, there is the risk of spreading the virus to the fetus. However, there are steps to be proactive to limit the risk of transmission to almost zero, such as talking to your doctors about what HIV medication is safe to take during pregnancy. The baby should also be tested once born to ensure they do not contract the virus.

Can I breastfeed?

Unfortunately, there is no way to eliminate the risk of transmission through breast milk. Therefore, formula feeding for their children is the only safe option.





**SUPPORTING
A WOMAN
YOU LOVE
WHO HAS
HIV**

A woman you love is HIV positive, how can you support her?

Follow these helpful ways of rewording how you speak to her to be both informed and comforting. The most important thing to remember is to be a kind listening ear and be helpful in whatever she needs.

WHAT TO SAY VS. WHAT NOT TO SAY:

1. **Instead of saying, “How did you get that?” Say, “Try talking to your recent partners, they may not know they have it.”**
2. **Instead of saying, “You need to see a doctor.” Try saying, “Have you talked to your doctor? They will have resources to help!”**
3. **Instead of saying, “What are you going to do?” Try saying, “What can I do to help?”**





Now is the time to take control of your body.

If you or a woman you love is struggling to cope with HIV, has additional questions or needs emotional support, call the Pennsylvania HIV/AIDS Hotline at (800) 662-6080 or visit ***TakeControlHIV.com.***

Resources

takecontrolhiv.com/linkage-to-care-form/locator.hiv.gov/
hud.gov/program_offices/comm_planning/hopwa
takecontrolhiv.com/resources/
payoutcongress.org/resources/hivaids-resources/

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