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# AIDS

is an illness we all know about, as it strikes a growing number of the people around us. Yet while more is known about the disease, it continues to arouse deep-rooted prejudice. In fact, people living with AIDS and those close to them are sometimes subject to discrimination which can have devastating psychological and social consequences. Because the epidemic is still spreading and there are ways to avoid becoming infected, it's important to review what we know about the illness. That way we can help keep the virus from spreading and eliminate the prejudice surrounding AIDS.

*AIDS, you better be concerned!*



# What is AIDS?

**A I D S**

or Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, is the most serious form of infection caused by the Human immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).

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## HIV :

- destroys the human body's defense system and makes it incapable of fighting illnesses and infections.
- enables other illnesses to develop which sooner or later can cause death.

HIV has no preference in terms of the sexual orientation, skin color or age of the people it affects. In brief, men and women of all ethnic origins, whether homosexual or heterosexual, must take all the necessary precautions to avoid becoming infected. With no cure for this illness, **PREVENTION** remains the single most effective means of fighting HIV.

# How is **HIV** transmitted?

**HIV**

is transmitted through sexual activity, by blood, or from a mother to her baby.

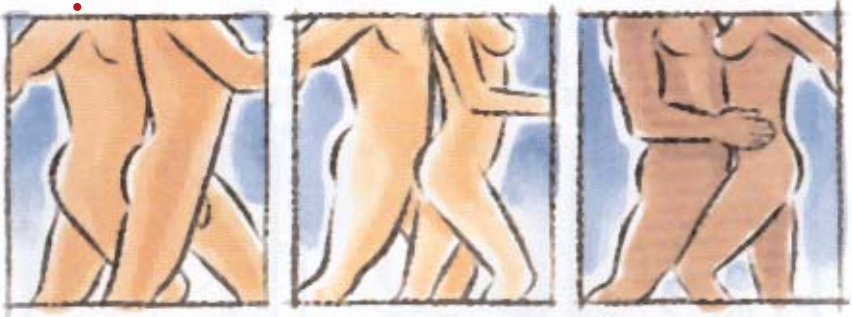
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1

## Transmission through sexual activity:

HIV is mainly transmitted through unprotected anal or vaginal intercourse with someone who is infected with HIV.



When sperm, vaginal secretions or menstrual blood enter the partner's body through anal or vaginal penetration, HIV can enter the bloodstream and spread throughout the body. The presence of other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) makes HIV transmission even easier.

2

## Transmission by blood:

Transmission of HIV through contact with infected blood is very common when people share materials to inject drugs (cocaine, heroin, steroids, etc.). In so doing, they risk injecting HIV directly into their bloodstream.



The needles used for tattoos and piercing ears can also transmit HIV if they have not been sterilized.

Since 1985 the Red Cross has made sure that all donor blood is analyzed and any contaminated blood removed, thereby minimizing the risk of HIV infection for recipients. Yet the risk was much greater

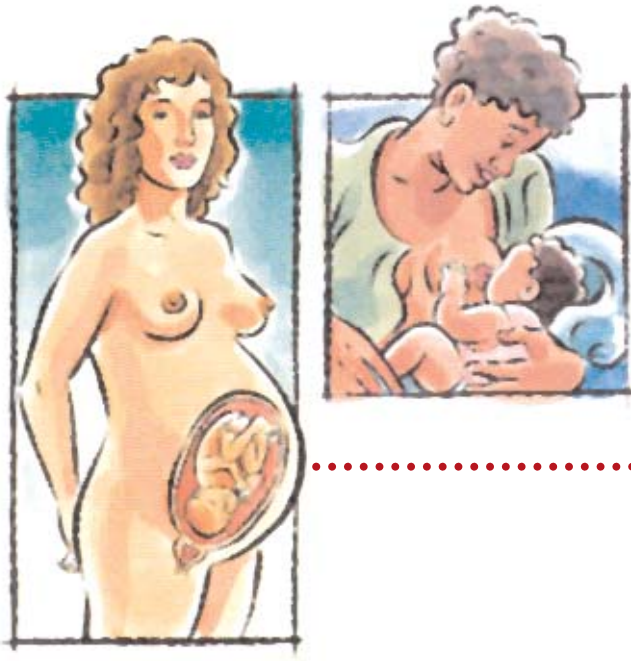
for anyone who received a blood transfusion between 1978 and 1985.

**IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO CONTRACT HIV BY GIVING BLOOD** since a new needle is used every time.

3

### **Transmission of HIV from mother to baby:**

A mother living with HIV can transmit the virus to her baby during pregnancy, birth or, less commonly, breastfeeding.



# Activities that do not transmit **HIV**

**HIV**

cannot survive in air  
or water and therefore,

unlike the viruses that cause  
the flu or chicken pox  
(varicella), is not contagious.

**HIV CANNOT BE TRANSMITTED**  
through everyday activities.

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**Examples of activities that do not transmit HIV:**



## Other activities that do not transmit HIV:



It is important, however, to avoid direct contact with blood, especially coming from open wounds. If it does happen, immediately wash the affected part of the body with soap and water.

# How can we avoid **HIV** transmission during sexual activity?

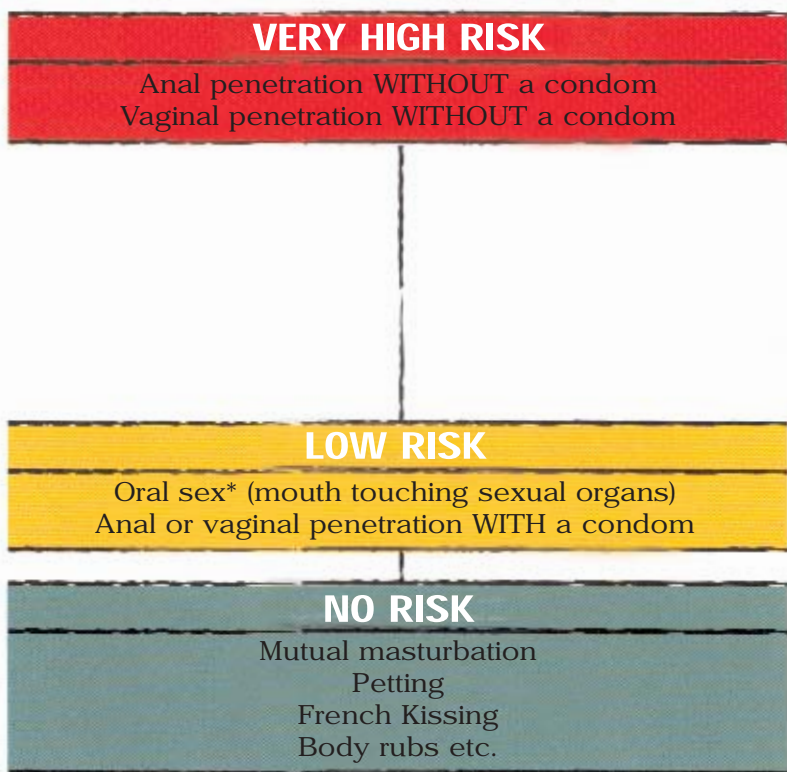
**I****F** If you choose to engage in sexual activity, the best way to reduce the risk of contracting HIV is to make sure that neither you nor your partner have been infected with the virus, and that you remain faithful to each other. Otherwise, you should practice safer sex.

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The following chart ranks different sexual activities according to the chances of transmitting HIV. Note that the more sexual partners you have, the greater the risk. The risk also increases during menstruation.

## Risks of transmitting HIV through sexual activity\*



\* Oral sex without a condom involves a very high risk of transmitting other STDs.

For those who engage in sexual activities involving penetration, a condom is the best source of protection against HIV and other STDs. Note that birth-control pills and IUDs (intrauterine devices) provide **ABSOLUTELY NO** protection against either HIV or other STDs.

Using a condom will definitely make you feel safer during sexual intercourse. Right from the start of any sexual activity, make sure it is clear that you intend to use a condom. To feel more comfortable wearing a condom, men who have never used one may wish to try one on alone.

### Here is some advice on how to use a condom properly:

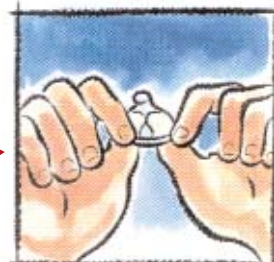


- Buy only lubricated latex condoms. Avoid those made from natural membranes as they offer no protection against STDs;
- Always check the expiry date;

- Carefully open the package with your fingers and not with your teeth (this can even be done before engaging in sexual activity);



- One of the partners should put the condom on the penis before any contact with the vagina or anus takes place;



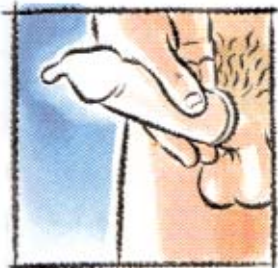
- Before placing the condom on the penis, unroll it a little to make sure you're not putting it on inside-out;



- While unrolling the condom, pinch the reservoir tip to leave room for the semen and keep the condom from bursting;

- Apply a few drops of a water-soluble lubricant (K-Y®, H-R®, Astroglide®, etc.) to both the inside and outside of the condom to make it easier to slip on and increase sensitivity. Never use oil-based lubricants such as Vaseline® or baby, massage or bath oils, which can weaken the latex and cause the condom to tear;





- ◀ • To prevent leakage, the man should hold the condom at the base and withdraw his penis shortly after ejaculating while it is still erect.



- ◀ • Tie a knot in the condom to keep the sperm from leaking out and throw it away.

You only have to use a condom a few times before it feels second-nature and, above all, gives you a strong sense of reassurance. Soon it becomes a habit. You may even find that using one can make your sexual intercourse last longer...

Numerous products containing nonoxynol are available on the market. It's a spermicide that prevents pregnancy. It can be found in lubricating gels, vaginal foams and many lubricated condoms. There is no evidence that condoms lubricated with nonoxynol provide better protection against STDs and HIV than those coated with a water-soluble lubricant. Nonoxynol is not recommended if it irritates the vagina and should not be used for anal or oral intercourse.

# How to prevent transmitting **HIV** through blood contact?

**IF YOU**

IF YOU inject drugs,  
**ALWAYS USE A NEW**  
**SYRINGE** and **NEVER** share  
your injecting materials.

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New syringes are available wherever you see the following sign:



If you cannot get a new syringe, it is extremely important to disinfect your injecting materials with pure bleach before using it again. The folder entitled “One Fit, One Shot” describes how to do this.

If you are living with HIV, or if you ever engaged in activities in which you risked contracting HIV, you can protect others by not giving blood.

# How can a mother avoid transmitting **HIV** to her baby?

## **STUDIES**

show that some medications can reduce the risk of a mother transmitting HIV to her baby. Moreover, the baby should not be breastfed.

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# Who should be tested for **HIV**?

**YOU** YOU should consider having yourself tested for HIV antibodies if you find yourself in any of the following situations:

- If you or your partner have had unprotected **sexual intercourse** once or several times with someone who:
  - is HIV-positive;
  - has or has had an STD;
  - has or has had multiple partners;

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- If you or your partner have shared needles or other materials for injecting drugs or steroids;
- If you or your partner have been tattooed with unsterilized needles;
- If you or your partner received a transfusion of blood or blood products between 1978 and 1985;
- If you are a steady couple and want to stop using condoms;
- If you are or would like to become pregnant.



**ANYONE WHO HAS NOT ENGAGED  
IN RISKY BEHAVIOR OR ACTIVITIES  
DURING WHICH THEY MAY HAVE  
CONTRACTED HIV DOES NOT NEED  
TO BE TESTED.**

If you're worried that you may be infected by HIV, talk to a doctor who will help you decide whether or not you should be tested. You can also contact an anonymous screening service in your area, where a specialized team will advise you in complete confidentiality. These agencies use codes rather than names to preserve your anonymity. Call the number for the Info-STD-AIDS line listed at the end of this brochure for the address of the nearest agency. **YOU SHOULD NOT USE A RED CROSS BLOOD CLINIC TO FIND OUT WHETHER OR NOT YOU ARE HIV-POSITIVE.**

## **What does a positive test mean?**

A positive test result means that the virus has entered your body. Yet there is no way of knowing how long it will take for you to develop symptoms or AIDS. Moreover, once you have HIV in your body, you can transmit it to others. This makes it essential for you to use a condom during sexual intercourse and not let anyone else use your syringes. You may also opt for sexual activities that do not involve penetration, such as petting, massaging and mutual masturbation.

## What does a negative test mean?

A negative test can mean one of two things:

- You have not been infected;
- Your bloodstream does not contain enough of the antibodies (substances formed in response to the presence of HIV) that fight the virus for the test to detect because the infection is too recent. This normally happens when the virus was contracted less than three months before the test. You may therefore have to take the test again.

A negative test result definitely does not mean that you can never become infected with HIV. You must always use a condom and clean syringes. If two partners take the test and both results are negative, they can stop using condoms if both are confident that the other person has been faithful in the three months before the test was performed and will remain that way.

# What are the different stages of **HIV** infection?

**FOR A**

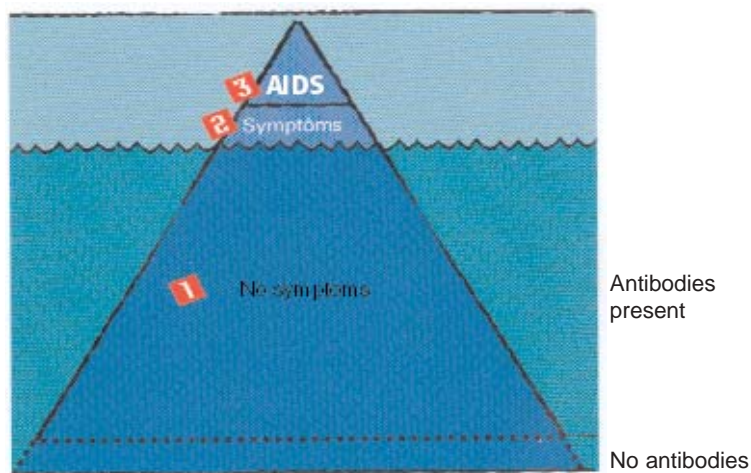
clear idea of how HIV infection develops, look at the following diagram.

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The iceberg represents everyone living with HIV. The portion above the water represents those who have symptoms, while the portion below represents those who do not.

## People living with HIV



On average, Stage 1 or the portion of the iceberg under the water, lasts about 10 years. It covers people living with HIV who have not experienced any symptoms. Yet even though they have no symptoms, they can still transmit the virus.

At the beginning of this stage people are normally considered seronegative because they haven't had enough time to develop antibodies.

Less than three months after the date they were infected, people living with HIV become seropositive and remain that way for the rest of their lives. Their state of health usually remains stable, and they lead normal lives and can work. The vast majority of people living with HIV are at this stage.

Stage 2 represents the moment HIV attacks the body. The immune system weakens and the infection can develop, producing increasingly serious signs and symptoms such as:

- Heavy swelling of the lymph glands, especially in the neck, armpits and groin;
- Chronic diarrhea (more than one month);
- Unexplained, prolonged fatigue;
- Significant weight loss unrelated to diet;
- Night sweats;
- Chronic fever (more than a month);
- Mouth infections (e.g. thrush);

- Persistent cough;
- Repeated gynecological problems (e.g. menstrual irregularity, unusual vaginal discharge, yeast infections).

These symptoms, which can also be related to other illnesses, may appear and disappear. A healthy lifestyle such as eating and sleeping well, not smoking, avoiding alcohol and drugs etc. can slow down the onset of the symptoms and AIDS. Obviously, it is still possible to transmit HIV during this stage.

The most visible portion of the iceberg, or the top, represents the 3rd stage of HIV infection. This is the point at which people living with HIV develop AIDS. The immune system can no longer protect the body and exposes it to all kinds of diseases (pneumonia, cancer, tuberculosis etc.) which among other things can lead to loss of sight, nerve disorders and ultimately death.

# Can **HIV** and **AIDS** be treated?

## **RIGHT NOW**

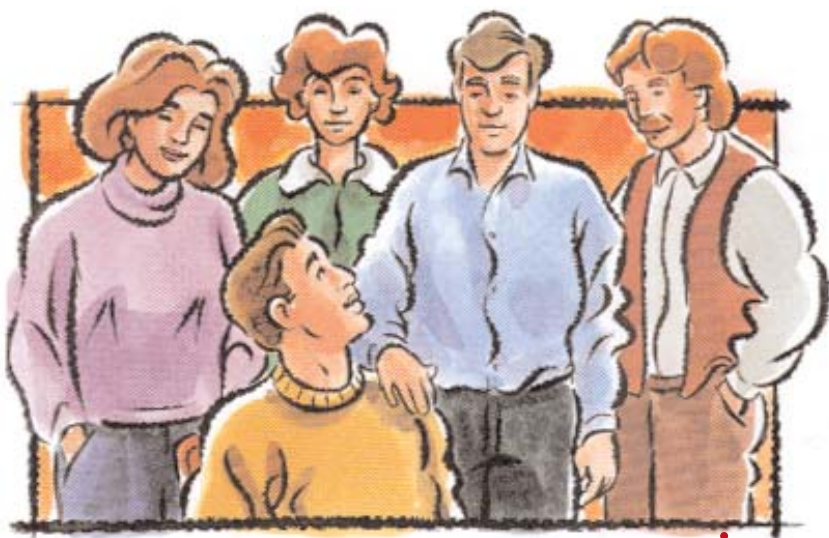
there is NO VACCINE or cure for the illness:

PREVENTION REMAINS THE ONLY WAY TO FIGHT THE SPREAD OF HIV. However, various drugs can slow the development of HIV within the body and keep AIDS symptoms from developing.

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Other medication can also be used to treat infections resulting from AIDS and help improve the individual's quality of life. Rapid advances in medical research give us hope that one day there will be a vaccine or drug capable of controlling the disease.



Until then, everyday life is often difficult for people living with HIV or AIDS. Even though the diagnosis may change their way of life, aspirations and priorities, one thing is certain: now more than ever, these people need support, love and understanding from all those around them.

If you need more information,  
contact your doctor or local  
CLSC, or call the Info-STD-AIDS  
line toll-free.

**Québec City area: 648-2626**  
**Elsewhere: 1-800-463-5656**

For the address of the  
community agency that deals  
with the problem of AIDS in  
your area, call:

la Coalition des organismes  
communautaires québécois de  
lutte contre le sida  
(COCQ-sida) at **(514) 844-2477**



Gouvernement du Québec  
Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux  
**Centre de coordination sur le sida**