



HIV, Hepatitis, and STDs

HIV and AIDS

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is the virus that causes the Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). AIDS is a disease in which the body's immune system breaks down. The immune system fights infections and diseases. When the immune system fails, a person with AIDS develops a variety of life-threatening illnesses. There is no vaccine or cure for HIV, but many people with HIV, especially those getting treatment, can live for years with the disease.

How You Can Become Infected With HIV

HIV is spread through the exchange of blood, semen, vaginal secretions, and breast milk by:

- Unprotected sexual contact with a person who has HIV/AIDS: anal, vaginal, and oral intercourse
- Sharing contaminated needles for injecting drugs
- Receiving a transfusion of infected blood or blood-clotting products (blood and blood products are now tested for HIV)
- An HIV-infected woman can give it to her baby during pregnancy, childbirth, or through breastfeeding.

How You Can Prevent HIV Infection

The best way to prevent the transmission of HIV is to use a condom every time during sex and not to share needles for injecting drugs. If you or someone you know is at risk for having HIV, it is important to get tested for the virus. It is also important to know if you have HIV, because you can help stay healthy through treatment and prevent spreading it to others.

Symptoms

A person who has recently contracted HIV might experience flu-like symptoms, or may have no symptoms at all, even for years. As the infection develops, there may be serious, long-lasting symptoms, such as:

- Swollen lymph glands in the neck, underarm, or groin area
- Fevers, including "night sweats"
- Fast weight loss for no apparent reason
- Constant tiredness
- Diarrhea and decreased appetite
- White spots or unusual mouth sores

Anyone who has any of these symptoms for more than a week should see a doctor.

Staying Healthy Through Prevention

There are many simple ways you can protect yourself, and others, from HIV, hepatitis, and other sexually transmitted infections.

- Use a latex condom for vaginal, anal, and oral sex (and use water-based lubricant).
- Use a latex barrier, such as a dental dam or a female condom, for other vaginal contact such as oral sex.
- Sex with one steady partner is safer than with multiple partners.
- If injecting drugs, do not share or reuse needles and don't reuse water. If needles are shared, clean them properly with bleach and always use clean water.
- Do not share toothbrushes and razors, which might have blood on them.
- Get vaccinated for hepatitis A and B if you are at risk for them.

If you think you are at risk for HIV, hepatitis, or any sexually transmitted infection, get tested. Treatment can help keep you healthy, and many STDs can be cured. You can also prevent spreading disease to other people.

CDC National AIDS Hotline
800-342-2437

CDC National AIDS Hotline TTY Service
800-243-7889

CDC National AIDS Hotline Spanish Service
800-344-7432

CDC National STD Hotline
800-227-8922

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Hepatitis C

Like HIV, hepatitis C can be a very serious disease that can be prevented. Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus. Usually this virus is spread through blood, but sexual contact can also spread hepatitis C.

After catching hepatitis C, most people have it for all their lives. Many people won't feel sick. However, over time they might have scarring of the liver (called cirrhosis) that can cause liver failure. They can also develop liver cancer. There is no vaccination (shot) to protect you from hepatitis C.

How Great Is Your Risk For Hepatitis C?

Talk with your health care provider about having a hepatitis C test if:

- You have ever injected street drugs, even if it was only once, or if it was several years ago
- You received blood products before 1987
- You had a blood transfusion or organ transplant before July 1992
- You were ever on long-term kidney dialysis
- You have ever had liver disease

Learning if you have hepatitis C is important so that you can get treatment and learn how you can prevent spreading it to others. You can prevent the transmission of hepatitis C by doing the following:

- Do not inject drugs, even experimenting once can be risky. Seek treatment if you do, and never reuse syringes, water, or drug works. If sharing needles, clean them with bleach and clean water.
- Do not share toothbrushes, razors, or other personal care products.

Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B

Hepatitis A and B can also cause liver damage. You can get hepatitis B through sexual contact or contact with blood. Hepatitis A is spread from person to person by putting something in the mouth that has been contaminated with the stool of a person with hepatitis A (fecal-oral transmission). The virus is more easily spread in places where there are unclean conditions or where personal cleanliness is not observed. In rare cases, you can get infected from contact with blood.

People are vaccinated to protect against hepatitis A and B. Talk with your doctor about the hepatitis B and hepatitis A vaccinations if you:

- Are sexually active with more than one steady partner, or you inject drugs
- Have been exposed to human blood at your job
- Have been exposed to unclean conditions where outbreaks are most likely to occur
- Have ever had liver disease

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

Other diseases can be transmitted through sexual contact. Protecting yourself by using condoms is the best way to prevent infection. Some STDs can also be spread from mother to baby. Knowing about these diseases and their symptoms is important. They can cause serious health problems such as damage to reproductive organs, infertility, and even death.

Symptoms

Some STDs may show no symptoms, especially for women. If undetected, an STD can cause serious health problems. Go to your doctor or a clinic for testing if you think you are at risk for an STD, or have any of these symptoms:

- Discharge from the penis or vagina
- Pain or burning while urinating
- Painful intercourse for women
- Spotting between periods or excessive bleeding
- Sores, warts, or rash, especially in the area of the penis, vagina, anus, buttocks, or mouth
- Swollen glands, fever, feeling run-down
- Nausea, vomiting
- Pain in the lower abdomen

STDs such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis can be cured with antibiotics. Herpes and HPV (human papilloma virus) can be treated but not cured. Infected people can learn how to prevent spreading it to others and how to have a safe pregnancy.

Information Provided by:
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