



# Durham Region Health Department Facts about...



## HIV/AIDS

### What is it?

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a virus that attacks the immune system. If untreated, HIV infection can cause AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome), which is the term used for the latest stage of disease. Though there isn't a cure, HIV is a manageable chronic condition with appropriate treatment and support.

**HIV/AIDS is a reportable infection and must be reported to the Health Department.**

### How is it spread?

- U=U (Undetectable = Untransmittable) means that if someone with HIV is appropriately treated and has had blood tests showing they don't have detectable virus, they cannot spread HIV in any way.
- HIV is found in the blood, semen, rectal fluid, vaginal fluid and breastmilk of someone who has HIV.
- HIV is spread by unprotected (vaginal, oral or anal) sexual contact or by sharing needles or other drug equipment with someone who has HIV.
- A person infected with HIV can pass the virus on to their baby during pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding.

You cannot get HIV from saliva, tears, coughing or sneezing, sharing the same drinking fountain, from a swimming pool, toilet seat, by shaking hands, hugging, or eating food that has been prepared by someone infected with the virus. You can't get HIV from any insect bite.

### What do I look for?

The time from HIV exposure to the start of symptoms is usually two to four weeks. Symptoms may include fever, swollen lymph nodes, headache, tiredness, sore throat, night sweats, rash, muscle aches, vomiting and diarrhea.

Symptoms that do not resolve or are severe may signal the onset of AIDS. Symptoms of AIDS include weight loss, sores, vision loss, yeast infections in the oral cavity and throat, recurrent pneumonia, cancer and damage to the nervous system. For women, recurrent yeast infections and abnormalities on pap tests can occur.

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## How do you test for it?

Testing for HIV is done by a blood test or a rapid point-of-care test, where you get results immediately from a finger prick. If a point-of-care test is positive, it needs to be confirmed by a blood test. As with all medical testing, the results are kept confidential by your healthcare provider. HIV is a reportable infection, so positive lab results are provided to public health. Some testing sites offer the option of anonymous or non-nominal testing, where results are not tied to your name.

## How is it treated?

HIV is treated with medications that reduce the amount of HIV in your body. Having less HIV in your body gives your immune system a chance to fight off infections and cancers. There is no cure for HIV, but with treatment many people living with HIV can have a long, healthy life and prevent spread to their partners.

## How can I protect myself?

- Practice safe sex and always use a condom with lubricant when having oral, vaginal, or anal sex.
- Do not share needles or drug equipment and use a new needle each time. New, clean needles and injection equipment are available through the John Howard Society of Durham Region - Project X-change program.
- If you are pregnant or plan to become pregnant, talk to your health care provider. A pregnant person with HIV can take medications to limit the chance of passing HIV onto their baby.
- If you are engaging in unprotected sex with people who are HIV positive or at risk of HIV, a healthcare provider can prescribe PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) to help prevent transmission.
- If you are exposed to blood, seek medical attention immediately. PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) is available to help prevent transmission if taken within 72 hours of exposure.
- HIV tests are available at your doctor's office, sexual health clinics or anonymous HIV-testing sites. Test results are confidential.

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