



HIV/AIDS



HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) attacks the body's immune system. This

means that the body becomes less able to defend itself against infections and certain diseases. Eventually common infections can become serious and rare infections and cancers can develop. The development of these infections and diseases is called AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). Although HIV/AIDS cannot yet be cured, it can be treated and more effective medicines are becoming available all the time.

TRANSMISSION

HIV is carried in blood, semen, vaginal fluids and in breast milk. To contract HIV, a person must come in contact with one of these body fluids in one of the following ways:

- by having unprotected sexual intercourse (anal or vaginal) with an infected person,
- by sharing needles or syringes,
- through injection of contaminated blood from a needle prick or from a blood transfusion received before April 1985 (since then all blood donations in Australia have been screened for HIV),
- transfer of the virus from mother to baby during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding.

IMPORTANT

HIV is a fragile virus that doesn't survive long outside the body. It isn't transmitted by casual, non-sexual contact.

You cannot contract HIV from:

- air conditioning
- sitting next to or touching someone who is HIV positive
- toilet seats
- giving blood at the blood bank
- money.

No evidence has been found to suggest that anyone has contracted HIV through:

- sweat, saliva or tears
- coughing, sneezing or spitting
- swimming pools
- bubblers
- mosquitoes or other biting insects.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

When people are first infected with HIV, they may feel unwell and have 'flu-like' symptoms such as a fever, swollen glands and a rash. Some people have no symptoms at all.

After infection, many people remain well with no symptoms for years. However, during this time the virus is still damaging the immune system.

As the disease progresses, a person may have ongoing symptoms such as constant tiredness, swollen glands (especially in neck, groin or armpits), night sweats, fevers, thrush, rapid weight loss and lasting diarrhoea. Eventually full-blown AIDS will develop. Serious illnesses associated with HIV/AIDS include dementia, infections such as pneumonia and tuberculosis, severe cold sores and genital herpes, unexplained bleeding and bruising, severe gut infections, and some forms of cancer.

Symptoms alone cannot be used to diagnose HIV/AIDS.

If you have some of the above symptoms or think you might have HIV, your doctor can order some special tests.

TESTS

Detecting HIV:

A blood test is used to detect HIV infection. An **ELISA test** detects HIV antibodies – things the body makes to fight infection. It can take a few weeks or longer after a person is first infected before these antibodies can be detected. A highly sensitive test called the **P24 antigen test** can be used if contact with HIV is very recent. Further tests are used to confirm that a person is HIV-positive. You can be tested for HIV by your doctor.

Monitoring HIV:

Blood tests are used to monitor the progress of HIV infection. They help determine what treatments to use and when to use them. A **Viral Load Test** shows how active the virus is. A **T-cell/CD4 cell count** is used to show how healthy the immune system is and indicates how much damage has already occurred.

TREATMENTS

The sooner a person is found to be HIV-positive, the sooner they can begin treatment to help them stay healthier longer. Medicines are used to treat HIV/AIDS for three different reasons:

- to reduce the amount of virus in the body (anti virals)
- to prevent the serious illnesses of AIDS (prophylactic or preventative drugs)
- to treat infections and diseases that occur as part of AIDS.

Several anti-viral medicines are now available which

Safe Sex

body to body rubbing; touching genitals with hands; kissing, including wet kissing (providing there are no cuts or sores in the areas or bleeding gums); hugging; masturbation; massage; protected anal and vaginal sex (use condom and water-based lube); oral sex (avoid semen in mouth); rimming and fisting (with glove or barrier).

Unsafe Sex

anal or vaginal intercourse without a condom (or with a condom that breaks); intercourse with withdrawal before ejaculation (without a condom); sharing sex toys.

slow down HIV and may delay the onset of AIDS. Using different combinations of these medicines means that there is less chance of the virus becoming resistant to the medicines than with earlier treatments. However, the medicines need to be taken regularly and frequently. Missed doses can give the virus a chance to grow.

Taking drug treatments for AIDS can be complicated. Support and understanding for people living with HIV/AIDS is important.

SELF CARE

- Be responsible for your own protection against infection.
- Have safe sex (low or no risk of HIV infection) – see above. Always use a condom.
- If you inject drugs don't share needles, syringes or other equipment.
- If you are at high risk of getting HIV, consider having a HIV test.
- Don't share razors, toothbrushes, etc.
- Make sure if you have body piercing or get tattoos that the provider uses sterile equipment.
- Note that even if someone infected with HIV has no

Your **Self Care** pharmacist

symptoms, they are still contagious.

- If you are at risk of HIV don't donate blood, organs or sperm.
- Talk to your doctor and pharmacist if you have any questions about treatments for HIV.

Contact:

Your doctor (listed under Medical Practitioner in the yellow pages of the telephone book).

Your State AIDS Council:

ACT	(02) 6257 2855
NSW	1800 063 060
NT	1800 011 180
QLD	1800 177 434
SA	1800 888 559
TAS	1800 005 900
VIC	1800 134 840
WA	13 10 25

Organisations listed under "AIDS" in the white pages of the telephone book.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist
To find: (02) 6281 1366



© Pharmaceutical Society
of Australia April 1998

Supported by
funding from

NSW HEALTH

Pharmacists are medicines experts.
Ask your pharmacist for advice when
choosing a medicine.

DAVID S. NOLTE, B.Pharm., M.P.S.
701-703 RATHDOWNE STREET, NORTH CARLTON
TEL: 9349 1522 FAX: 9349 1115

