



The Sexual Health Clinic aims to use language that everyone can relate to. People use different words to describe their bodies. This document uses medical terms such as vagina and breast to describe genitals, but some people may use other terms such as private parts, front hole, or chest. We acknowledge and respect that people use words that they are comfortable with.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)

What is HIV?

HIV is an infection that can weaken a person's immune system and their ability to fight infections. Over time, this can lead to people becoming sick or seriously ill. Symptoms of HIV can include sore muscles, feeling tired, night sweats, sore throat, fever, weight loss, swollen lymph nodes, but generally, people have no symptoms at all.

When HIV is in the body for a long time without any treatment, it can lead to the most serious stage called Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). During this stage, the immune system is so weak that rare infections and cancers may develop.

How does someone get HIV?

HIV is found in blood, semen (including pre-ejaculate), vaginal fluids, rectal fluids, and breast milk of people living with HIV.

The main ways to pass HIV between people are by:

- Having anal or vaginal sex without a condom
- Sharing needles/syringes used to inject drugs (including steroids)

Other ways to pass HIV between people include:

- Having oral sex without a condom or dental dam
- Sharing sex toys
- Sharing drug equipment, like cookers, filters, pipes, etc.
- Sharing needles, ink or jewellery for tattoos, body piercings or body modifications
- Sharing acupuncture needles
- Pregnancy, childbirth or breast feeding.

** Having a bacterial sexually transmitted infection (STI), like chlamydia, gonorrhea or syphilis, can increase the risk of getting HIV. Regular testing for all STIs is an important part of safer sex.*

HIV is not passed through:

- Shaking hands
- Hugs or kisses
- Coughs or sneezes
- Toothbrushes, utensils, etc.

- Toilet seats or water fountains
- Insects or animals

How do I practice safer sex?

- Use an internal or external condom, every time you have vaginal and/or anal sex
- Use an external condom or dental dam every time you have oral sex
- Use water-based or silicone-based lubricants
- If you share sex toys, cover the toy with a condom and clean after each use
- Get tested for STIs regularly

How do I practice safer drug use?

- Use new equipment every time you inject, including needles, syringes and all other supplies (like cookers, filters and water)
- Never share equipment with anyone, including your sex partner(s)
- Access Needle and Syringe Programs or Supervised Consumption Services for new equipment and harm reduction services

What is HIV PrEP?

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is the use of HIV medications by HIV-negative persons to prevent getting HIV infection. PrEP involves taking medication every day and seeing a provider every three months for follow-up and testing. Speak to your healthcare provider about access to PrEP. You can also obtain additional information on PrEP from Ottawa Public Health.

For more information, go to <http://thesexyouwant.ca/prep/>

What is HIV PEP?

Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is the use of HIV medications by HIV-negative persons after a known or potential exposure to HIV. This medication should be started right away, ideally within the first 24-48 hours after the potential exposure. It must be started within 72 hours and is taken every day for 28 days total. PEP can be accessed at any hospital Emergency Department or at the Ottawa Public Health Sexual Health Clinic.

For more information, go to <http://thesexyouwant.ca/pep/>

How do I get tested for HIV?

The most reliable way to be tested for HIV is through a serological blood test done 3 and 6 weeks after having sex or sharing drug equipment. Another method is a rapid/self-test done 12 weeks after having sex or sharing drug equipment. However, a positive rapid/self-test must be confirmed by a serological blood test to confirm it is a true positive (as false-positives can occur with rapid/self-tests).

What happens if I have a positive serological blood test result?

You will be contacted by a public health nurse (PHN) who will provide you with resources, counselling, support, and information to help guide your care, including linking you to an HIV healthcare provider, community services, and/or social workers. The PHN will also help you notify your sexual and/or drug-equipment sharing partners so that they can be tested and receive support as well.

People living with HIV can access medication that will help to reduce the level of virus in their blood. This can reduce the chance of passing the infection to other partners.

People living with HIV may need to disclose their HIV status to partners before having sex or sharing needles/drug equipment. *For further questions/support about disclosure, please go to the HIV/AIDS Legal Clinic Website, HALCO, at www.halco.org or call 416-340-7790.*

Call the **Sexual Health Infoline Ontario** at 1-800-668-2437 if you have questions or need help.

For more information:

PEP, PrEP, HIV/STI: thesexyouwant.ca

STI testing, birth control: www.sexandu.ca

HIV legal services: www.halco.org or call 416 340-7790

HIV information: www.catie.ca call 1-800- 263-1638

The Site Harm Reduction Program

Site Office (Needle & Syringe and Supervised Consumption Services)

179 Clarence St
Ottawa. ON K1N5P7
613-580-2424 ext. 29047
9am-5pm daily

Site Van- Mobile harm reduction services

5pm-11:30pm daily
613-232-3232 (collect calls accepted)

Visit www.ottawapublichealth.ca/harmreduction for more information on local harm reduction resources.

Free Condoms
Sexitsmart.ca



At home HIV testing



GetaKit.ca



Contraception Information
Itsaplan.ca



SOGC



Contact us

Sexual Health Clinic

179 Clarence St

Ottawa, ON K1N 5P7

613-234-4641 | TTY: 613-580-9656

