



## 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/chestfeeding

*\* 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 safe injection sites for new equipment and care

### **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 or by visiting GayZone. 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 must be started within 72-hours and is taken every day for 28-days total. PEP can be accessed at any 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 only way to be tested for HIV is through a blood test done 6-12 weeks after having sex or sharing drug equipment.

### **What happens if I have a positive 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 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 must disclose their HIV status to all 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](http://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](http://thesexyouwant.ca)
- STI testing, birth control: [www.sexandu.ca](http://www.sexandu.ca)
- HIV legal services: [www.halco.org](http://www.halco.org) or call 416 340-7790
- HIV information: [www.catie.ca](http://www.catie.ca) call 1-800- 263-1638.

### **Sexual Health Clinic**

179 Clarence St, Ottawa. ON  
613-234-4641 | TTY: 613-580-9656  
[OttawaPublicHealth.ca](http://OttawaPublicHealth.ca)

### **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-9pm daily

#### **Site Van- Mobile harm reduction services**

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

Visit [Harm Reduction Services In Ottawa](#) for more information on local resources