



HIV - the basics

What is HIV?

- The letters “HIV” stand for “human immunodeficiency virus”.
- HIV is a blood borne virus.
- HIV attacks your immune system. Your immune system helps stop you getting sick.

How do you get HIV?

- You can get HIV from having sex with someone who has it.
- You can get HIV from sharing injecting drug equipment or tattooing equipment with someone who has it.
- Babies can get HIV from their mother during pregnancy or while breastfeeding.

What is AIDS?

- AIDS stands for “Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome”.
- AIDS is different to HIV.
- People who don’t get treated for HIV can go on to get AIDS.
- People in Australia don’t usually get AIDS anymore because treatment is available.

Can you get HIV from food or water, kissing or hugging, or from mosquitoes, or toilet seats? Or if someone coughs or sneezes on you?

- No.

Safe injecting

- HIV can be passed on in small amounts of infected blood. Do not share injecting equipment with other people.
- You can get clean syringes in chemists, health clinics, and community centres.

Safe tattooing

- HIV can be passed on in small amounts of infected blood. Do not share tattooing or piercing equipment with other people.
- Get tattoos in a tattoo shop where you can check they use clean equipment.

Symptoms – how would I know if I got HIV?

- People who get HIV don’t have any symptoms or signs for a few weeks, and then it can feel like the flu.



- After that people can feel well for years before getting very sick.
- The only way of knowing whether you have HIV is to get tested.

Can HIV be passed on if there are no symptoms?

- Yes.

Get tested

- Testing for HIV can be done at the clinic, by taking a blood sample.
- You can get tested as part of your men's or women's health check.

Get treated

- There is no cure for HIV. People with HIV need to take tablets called antiretrovirals every day for the rest of their life.
- If you take HIV treatment tablets you can live a healthy life.
- If you stay on treatment you are less likely to pass HIV on to your sexual partners.
- If you don't get treated you may develop AIDS and or other sickness.

Let's look after our health and get tested for HIV and STIs. If we all test and get treated, we can stop the spread of HIV and STIs in our community.