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**HIV**

What you need  
to know

**BECAUSE....CARING  
COMES NATURALLY TO US**

## What is HIV ?







HIV stands for the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. This disease destroys your immune system. Your immune system protects the body against infection. The disease that develops as a result of being infected by HIV is called AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

## What causes HIV ?

HIV infection is caused by the human immunodeficiency virus. When HIV is present in the body, it starts to destroy the CD4 T-cells, which are white blood cells that help the body fight disease and infection.

## How is HIV spread ?

It is spread through contact with certain body fluids from a person who is HIV-infected. These include:

-  **Blood**
-  **Pre-seminal fluids**
-  **Seminal fluids**
-  **Vaginal fluids**
-  **Rectal fluids**
-  **Breast milk**

HIV can therefore be spread during sexual contact with an infected person, from an HIV-positive mother during pregnancy and childbirth, as well as while breastfeeding. HIV is also spread by sharing infected needles with other people during illicit drug use. During blood transfusions the virus may also be transmitted. To eliminate this risk, blood banks around the world test blood supply for HIV antibodies.

## How is HIV diagnosed ?

The most common diagnostic test for HIV is the **Rapid Test**. This test has 99% accuracy, is cost effective and results are available within 30 minutes. A small sample of blood is taken from a finger prick, or the inside of the cheek or gums is swabbed. If the test is positive, a second test is done, either by using a different type of rapid test, or the **ELISA Test** is done. This test is done by drawing two sets of specimens and two different kits in order to confirm the patient's identity. The result may take several days.

## What are the other names for HIV ?

In South Africa the virus and resulting disease are often referred to as HIV/AIDS. However, AIDS is the final stage of HIV infection, and not everyone who has contracted HIV, advances to having AIDS.



# Are there different types of HIV ? **Yes** there are 3 stages:



## **STAGE 1: Acute HIV Infection:**

Within two to six weeks after you've been infected, you may develop flu-like symptoms. This stage is also known as the ARS (acute retroviral syndrome), 'primary HIV infection' stage or seroconversion stage. Large amounts of the virus are now being produced in the body. The number of CD4-T cells falls rapidly. Your immune system tries to fight this infection and reduces the level of virus in your body to what is known as a viral set point. Your CD4-T cell count rises to some extent. This is when treatment becomes beneficial. During this stage your risk of infecting other people is extremely high.



## **STAGE 2: Clinical Latency Stage:**

'Latency' literally means 'hidden'. During this stage your symptoms are hidden, even though the HIV is still active. Some people who are treated during this stage, can keep their disease in this stage for several decades.



## **STAGE 3: AIDS Stage:**

In this stage your immune system is badly damaged, and starts being susceptible to as 'opportunistic infections'. These infections attack bodies that are immunocompromised, which is why HIV-infected people are likely to develop them. You progress to the AIDS stage when your CD4 T-cell count falls below 200 cells per cubic millimetre of blood. The CD4T-cell count of a healthy individual who has between 500 – 1600 cells/mm<sup>3</sup>. The survival rate of people at this stage, is around three years, although an opportunistic infection could decrease this time span.



# What are the symptoms of HIV ?



## STAGE 1: Acute HIV Infection:

- ✚ Flu-like symptoms
- ✚ Fever
- ✚ Fatigue
- ✚ Nausea and vomiting
- ✚ Diarrhoea
- ✚ Swollen glands
- ✚ Sore throat
- ✚ Red rash on the torso (doesn't itch)
- ✚ Muscle and joint aches
- ✚ Headache

## STAGE 2: Clinical Latency Stage:

- ✚ No symptoms
- ✚ May last for 10 years
- ✚ The body has lost the fight against HIV
- ✚ The person (often unknowingly) passes HIV onto others
- ✚ CD4 T-cell count drops steadily, making them more and more vulnerable to other infections

## STAGE 3: AIDS Stage:

- ✚ CD4 T-cell count drops to below 200
- ✚ Tired all the time
- ✚ Swollen lymph nodes in the neck or groin
- ✚ Fever lasting for 10 or more days
- ✚ Night sweats
- ✚ Unexplained weight loss
- ✚ Purplish spots on the skin that don't go away
- ✚ Shortness of breath
- ✚ Long-lasting diarrhoea
- ✚ Yeast infections in mouth/throat/vagina
- ✚ Bruises easily; unexplained bleeding

## Are certain people more at risk of developing

HIV **?** **Yes** the following people have a greater risk:



Those who have unprotected sex



Sexually transmitted infections like herpes can produce open sores on your genitals. These make you far more vulnerable to contracting HIV



Studies indicate that uncircumcised men have a greater chance of contracting HIV



Those who share needles when using illicit drugs



Infected mothers can infect their babies during pregnancy or birth, or while breastfeeding



People who need blood transfusions.

## Why should HIV be treated **?**

If left untreated, HIV can be fatal. Your quality of life and your prognosis for staying alive is far greater if you receive proper treatment, which is readily available in South Africa.

## How is HIV treated ?

Antiretroviral (ARV) treatment is used to treat HIV, and has been freely available in South Africa for over a decade. Treatment with ARVs is life saving and increases life expectancy. South Africa now has record lows in mother-to-child HIV transmission rates.

## Are there any lifestyle changes I could make, to prevent HIV ?

- + Always use condoms during sexual intercourse
- + Do not share needles if you are injecting yourself with illegal drugs
- + Prevent your unborn child from contracting the disease from you, by continuing your ARV medication, and do not breastfeed.





References: <https://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/hiv-aids-101/what-ishiv-aids/>; <https://aidsinfo.nih.gov/education-materials/fact-sheets/19/45/hiv-aids--the-basics>; <http://ewn.co.za/2015/11/30/10-facts-about-HIV-AIDS-ahead-of-World-AIDS-Day>; <http://www.worldaidsday.org/about>; <http://www.health24.com/Medical/HIV-AIDS/Overview/What-is-HIVAids-20130205>; <http://www.webmd.com/hiv-aids/guide/humanimmunodeficiency-virus-hiv-infection-cause>,

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