

## How Do I Know That I Have HIV?

### Question 1

- b** *Oral sex is not very risky for HIV. There is a small chance but it is rare. A person's chances could be higher if they have cuts in their mouth or bleeding gums when they go down on a person. It's a good idea to avoid cumming into the mouth if the other person has cuts in their mouth, or has just brushed their teeth! Other sexually transmitted infections are more easily spread by oral sex like herpes, chlamydia and gonorrhoea.*

#### **Oral sex**

Australian safe sex guidelines do not advocate using a condom for oral sex unless mouth or penis or labia have cuts or sores, because the risk of HIV transmission is believed to be minute. You can go down on a vagina or penis with a low risk of catching HIV, but other STIs can be passed on in this way. You can lower the risks further by making sure you and your partner have no cuts or sores around and in your genitals and mouths.

To lower the risk further avoid getting your partner's cum in your mouth.

To be extra safe don't brush your teeth just before oral sex. If your gums bleed easily, it is better to use a condom for oral sex.

### Question 2

- a** *A blood test. The blood test for HIV shows whether or not there are antibodies (cells that fight infection) to the virus in your blood.*

#### **HIV testing**

Confidential and anonymous HIV testing are also available in the US. Anonymous testing is available in 39 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Test results are given by randomly assigned numbers at the time of testing.

#### **Types of HIV Antibody Tests**

A wider range of tests are available in the US. All testing options are not available in all areas. Contact your local health department for the tests available in your area.

**Standard blood test:** This was the first HIV antibody test as described above. It is the most widely used.

Urine and oral-fluid HIV tests offer alternatives for anyone reluctant to have blood drawn.

Urine testing for HIV antibodies is not as sensitive or specific as blood testing. A physician must order these tests, and the results are reported to the ordering physician or his or her assistant.

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### Question 3

- a** *It takes up to three months for the body to develop signs that can be seen in a blood test. Most people develop antibodies 20 days. The most common test for HIV is an HIV antibody test. When a virus gets into a person's body, cells are made to get rid of the 'invader'. These cells are called antibodies. An HIV antibody test is looking for signs of HIV antibodies.*

#### **Waiting periods**

To find out when you should be tested, discuss it with your doctor. The tests commonly used to detect HIV infection actually look for antibodies produced by your body to fight HIV. Most people will develop detectable antibodies within 3 months after infection, the average being 20 days. In rare cases, it can take 6-12 months. During the time between exposure and the test, it is important to avoid any behavior that might result in exposure to blood, semen, or vaginal secretions.

Important things to remember about the HIV antibody test are:

- It can take up to two weeks for the test results to come back.
- You should go back to the clinic to get the results in person, not over the phone. If you find you have HIV it is important you are supported by people who understand its implications and the support you will need.

From: [www.hivtest.gov](http://www.hivtest.gov)

### Question 4

- a** *Yes, a lot of people do get symptoms, but not everyone does, and it can be easy to miss. If a person is infected, a few weeks later some get a flu-like illness that usually includes a fever. But, a lot of illnesses have those symptoms, so the only way to know for sure is to have an HIV antibody test.*

#### **What happens after a person is infected with HIV?**

It is important to understand that once a person has contracted HIV they will react to the infection in an individual way. There is no certainty about what will happen to a person's health because so many different factors can be involved. Around 50% of people have what is called an acute short-term reaction to the infection a couple of weeks after HIV first enters their blood. They may develop a cold or flu-like illness from which they will recover quite quickly. This is called seroconversion (sero=blood), meaning the conversion from being HIV antibody negative to positive.

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### Question 5

- b** *Condoms are very effective in preventing HIV transmission when used the right way. The virus cannot pass through the condom. They have a 2% breakage rate.*

#### **Condoms – how effective are they?**

Latex condoms, when used consistently and correctly during vaginal, oral, or anal intercourse, are highly effective in preventing the sexual transmission of HIV. Condom use is also associated with lower rates of cervical cancer, a disease associated with human papillomavirus (HPV).

Laboratory studies show that latex condoms provide an essentially impermeable barrier to particles the size of HIV pathogens. Studies show that polyurethane condoms, including the female condom, are also effective barriers against sperm, bacteria, and viruses such as HIV.

The condom—latex or polyurethane, male or female—is the only technology currently available to prevent HIV transmission during sexual intercourse with an infected partner.

A number of carefully conducted studies, employing rigorous methods and measures, have demonstrated that consistent condom use is highly effective in preventing HIV transmission. In a two-year study of sero-discordant couples (in which one partner was HIV-positive and one was HIV-negative), no uninfected partner became infected among couples using condoms correctly and consistently at every act of sexual intercourse (vaginal or anal).

From: *The Facts: Condom Effectiveness*, available at: <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/index.htm>

#### **How to Use a Condom**

1. Open packet with care to avoid tearing the condom.
2. Squeeze the tip of the condom between your finger and thumb to remove air and roll the condom down the penis.
3. Once the condom is on the penis cover with water-based lubricant.
4. Hold the condom at the base of the penis when you withdraw to prevent semen spilling out.

### Question 6

- b** *Is higher. People who have a sexually transmitted infection (STI) have a 5 to 10 times greater risk of getting HIV. STIs can be treated, and some can be cured. It is worth seeing a doctor as soon as you can to prevent any long term damage, like infertility.*

#### **Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) Increase Risk for HIV**

There is now strong evidence that other STIs increase the risk of HIV transmission and, conversely, that STI treatment reduces the spread of HIV. Studies have repeatedly demonstrated that people are 2-5 times more likely to become infected with HIV when other STIs are present. STIs that cause genital lesions can create a portal of entry for HIV. STIs without lesions increase the number of HIV target cells (T-cells) in cervical secretions, thereby likely increasing HIV susceptibility in women.

Studies suggest that co-infection with HIV and other STIs results both in more shedding of HIV and in greater concentrations of HIV being shed.



## How Do I Know That I Have HIV?

## Question 7

- a *Condoms are not sold in every country. When they are available, lack of money or shame may stop a person from buying them. And in many parts of the world, female condoms are not available.*

**Condom availability**

The Catholic Church is telling people in countries stricken by AIDS not to use condoms because they have tiny holes in them through which HIV can pass - potentially exposing thousands of people to risk. The church is making the claims across four continents despite a widespread scientific consensus that condoms are impermeable to HIV.

The World Health Organisation has condemned the Vatican's views, saying: "These incorrect statements about condoms and HIV are dangerous when we are facing a global pandemic which has already killed more than 20 million people, and currently affects at least 42 million."

The church opposes any kind of contraception because it claims it breaks the link between sex and procreation - a position Pope John Paul II has fought to defend.

In Kenya - where an estimated 20% of people have HIV - the church condemns condoms for promoting promiscuity and repeats the claim about permeability. In Lwak, near Lake Victoria, the director of an AIDS testing centre says he cannot distribute condoms because of church opposition. Gordon Wambi told the programme: "Some priests have even been saying that condoms are laced with HIV/Aids." Panorama found the claims about permeable condoms repeated by Catholics as far apart as Asia and Latin America.

From: *Vatican: condoms don't stop AIDS*, Steve Bradshaw, Thursday October 9, 2003, The Guardian

## Question 8

- c *Anyone who has ever shared a needle and syringe is at extremely high risk of infection of HIV, Hepatitis B and C.*

**Injecting drug use and HIV**

Globally, sex between men and women is by far the most common way of passing on HIV. But a second transmission route drives the epidemic in many, if not most, countries outside Africa. That is transmission among men and women who inject drugs. Injection of any sort is an even more efficient way of spreading HIV than sexual intercourse. Since injecting drug users are often linked in tight networks and commonly share injecting equipment with other people without cleaning it, HIV can spread very rapidly in these populations.

Also, like other sexually active people, people who inject drugs may acquire HIV infection through their sexual partners if they have unprotected sex. In the USA, it is estimated that 9 out of 10 cases of heterosexual transmission of HIV in New York City are related to sex with a drug user. In some places, including much of China and parts of India and Myanmar, more women are infected through sex with drug users than any other way. Injecting drug use also contributes to mother-to-child transmission of HIV. In Uruguay, 40% of babies with HIV are born to mothers who inject drugs.

From: <http://www.avert.org/druguse.htm>



## How Do I Know That I Have HIV?

### Question 9



*The earlier a person knows they have HIV, the earlier they can start treatment which can slow HIV down and delay AIDS. It is harder to treat people if they are at the very late stages of HIV infection. For a woman considering having children, treatments can be extremely effective in having a child without HIV. Finding out you have HIV is an important message that may save or extend your life.*

#### **Better off not knowing**

Fear about the consequences of testing, lack of access to care and treatment, and the stigma of being HIV positive can stop people from getting tested. (1) Life-extending medication has drastically reduced the number of US AIDS deaths in the past two decades from about 51,000 in 1995 to about 16,000 in 2001. The earlier a person knows they have HIV, the earlier they can start treatment which can slow HIV down and delay AIDS. It is harder to treat people if they are at the very late stages of HIV infection. For a woman considering having children, treatments can be extremely effective in having a child without HIV.

There are many sites where confidential testing and counselling are available.

The US Centre for Disease Control maintains a database providing names and addresses of clinics and medical facilities providing these services all over the country. That database is available at <http://www.hivtest.org/locate/TestingSiteSearch/TestingSiteSearch.cfm>

(1) NAPWA Executive Director Terje Anderson June 27 - \*EPF318 06/26/2002  
National HIV Testing Campaign Underway June 27  
(U.S. government health agencies join NGO to encourage testing) (550)

