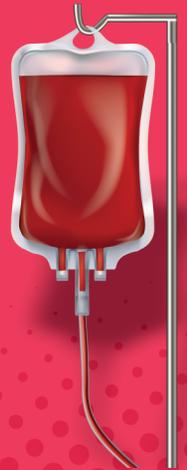




# HIV/AIDS

## Q1. What is HIV?

As per UNAIDS, Human Immunodeficiency Virus or HIV is a retrovirus that infects cells of the human immune system and destroys their function. Infection with this virus results in the depletion of the immune system, leading to immunodeficiency. It can only be transmitted from one human to another.



## Q2. How is HIV passed on or transmitted?

HIV can be transmitted in a number of ways. It can be transmitted only through the exchange of the following bodily fluids:

- Blood
- Semen
- Vaginal fluids
- Breast milk

## Q3. Can someone get HIV from casual contact?

HIV is not transmitted by casual contact. HIV is not an airborne or food-borne virus, and it does not live long outside the body.

HIV is not transmitted through:

- Shaking hands
- Hugging
- Casual kissing
- Sharing a toilet
- Sharing food or utensils
- Sharing clothes or towels
- Coughing/sneezing



#### **Q4. Can HIV be transmitted through saliva, tears, sweat or earwax?**

NO. Contact with saliva, tears, sweat or earwax have never been known to transmit HIV.

#### **Q5. Can HIV be transmitted by a mosquito bite?**

Mosquitoes are not capable of transmitting HIV infection. The virus is not able to survive or replicate inside the mosquito or any other insect/animal. In addition, a mosquito sucks the human blood but does not inject it in another.



#### **Q6. Can HIV be transmitted by getting a tattoo or through body piercing?**

The risk of HIV transmission does exist, if instruments contaminated with infected blood are either not sterilised or disinfected (not cleaned thoroughly), or shared between clients. However, the risk of this happening is low.

#### **Q7. Is there any way HIV can create itself?**

HIV cannot create itself under any circumstances. HIV does not develop in a person's body of its own accord; it has to be transmitted from an infected person.

#### **Q8. What are the high-risk behaviours for contracting HIV?**

The following behaviours and conditions put individuals at a greater risk of contracting HIV:

- Having unprotected sex
- Sharing contaminated needles, syringes and other injecting equipment
- Receiving unsafe injections, blood transfusions and tissue transplantation, and medical procedures that involve unsterile cutting or piercing
- Accidental needle stick (point) injuries among health workers
- A pregnant woman who is HIV positive may pass on the virus to her new-born baby during pregnancy, during birth or just after delivery, through breastfeeding



## **Q9. What is AIDS?**

AIDS is Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome. A virus, called HIV, causes it. It is the last stage of the HIV infection, which damages and ultimately destroys the immune system.

## **Q10. Are AIDS and HIV the same thing?**

HIV is a virus while AIDS is a syndrome or condition caused by HIV. People with HIV do not always have AIDS. AIDS is used to describe a number of potentially life-threatening infections and illnesses that happen when your immune system has been severely damaged by HIV. While AIDS cannot be transmitted from one person to another, HIV can.

## **Q11. Are there any symptoms of HIV infection or AIDS?**

There are no “set” symptoms of HIV infection or AIDS. Many people who are infected with HIV do not have any symptoms at all for many years. The following may be warning signs of infection with HIV:

- Unexplained weight loss greater than 10% of body weight
- Fever persisting for more than a month
- Chronic diarrhoea for longer than one month
- Persistent cough for longer than one month
- Severe fatigue
- Night sweats
- Sores in the mouth
- Swelling in the armpits, neck etc
- Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI)

However, no one should assume that they are infected if they have any of these symptoms. Each of these symptoms can be related to other illnesses. The only way to determine whether one is infected is through testing for HIV infection.

## “ What is the immune system and how does it work? ”

Every human being has an inbuilt defence system to protect the body from diseases. This defence system is known as the immune system. It consists of special cells called White Blood Cells (WBCs). When any virus invades the body, the WBCs fight against the virus and in this way our immune system protects us from falling ill.



John Hopkins University says that the immune system protects the body from outside invaders, such as bacteria, viruses, fungi, and toxins (chemicals produced by microbes). It is made up of different organs, cells, and proteins that work together.

## Q12. What are the tests for HIV?

There are essentially two tests that are conducted to detect whether a person is infected with HIV or not. These are:

1. ELISA TEST is the most common test done to detect HIV infection.
2. WESTERN BLOT TEST.

Both the tests determine the presence of HIV antibodies in a person's blood. In government hospitals, the ELISA test is conducted for detecting HIV infection. The Western Blot test is also available and is used as a confirmatory test. Another new test called the PCR test has been developed which detects the virus itself. This is very expensive and mostly used for research purposes in our country.

## Q13. What is the Window Period for HIV testing?

Normal HIV blood test can detect the presence of antibodies in the human body, only after 6-12 weeks (upto 6 months in some cases) after exposure to infection as the virus takes time to form detectable quantities in the infected body. This period of 6-12 weeks is called the window period. During this period, the HIV status may not show in the test but the person can be infected.



## Q16. How does one protect oneself from HIV infection?

“Prevention is always better than cure” especially in HIV/AIDS as it is still incurable. We must ensure that we do not indulge in high-risk behaviours that will make us susceptible to the virus. The following ways can be adopted to protect oneself from the virus :

- Abstinence from sexual intercourse is the best way to avoid HIV transmission. If not abstinence then, use condoms for safe and protected sex
- Transfusion of blood and other blood products from a licensed blood bank. Make sure that the blood/product has the stamp of “HIV Free” on it
- Use of disposable, sterile needles and syringes
- HIV testing of pregnant women
- Regular testing and treatment of STIs

**During blood transfusion, make sure to use HIV free stamp blood!**



**Remember! Abstinence from sexual intercourse is the best way to avoid HIV transmission.**

### **Q17. Are there any drugs to treat AIDS?**

No cure has been found till date for HIV/AIDS. However, due to medical advancements, an HIV infected person can live a long and healthy life with the help of drugs and therapies. Drugs are not a cure for HIV but they help in fighting the virus. Drugs are also available which can slow down the multiplication of HIV in the body. These are called anti-retroviral drugs. These drugs do not eliminate the virus but are useful in letting HIV/AIDS infected people live a full life.

### **Q18. Is there any vaccine to protect against HIV/AIDS?**

Till date, there are no vaccines available. However, research is going on to develop a vaccine.

### **Q19. What are STIs?**

STIs are Sexually Transmitted Infections. STIs are spread predominantly by sexual contact, including vaginal, anal and oral sex. Condoms provide the most effective method of protection against STIs.

### **Q20. What is UTI?**

Urinary tract infection (UTI) is an infection in any part of your urinary system – your kidneys, ureters, bladder and urethra. It causes burning or pain during urination. Women are at a greater risk of developing UTI than men. Sanitary hygiene & adequate hydration is important.



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