

Learn the facts. Protect yourself. Get tested.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus

(hew-mun im-YOO-no dih-FISH-en-see VYE-rus)

usually called "HIV"

What is HIV?

It's caused by **a virus** that attacks your body and makes it hard for you to fight off other infections.

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS.

AIDS (*Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome*) is a condition where your body becomes unable to protect itself from certain kinds of infections. This means that people with AIDS can get diseases which a healthy person's body would normally fight off easily.

Once you have the HIV virus in your body, it becomes easier for you to get sick from other things. A health care provider can tell from testing your blood how much virus you have in your body and how hard it may be for your body to protect itself from other germs.

When your body gets too weak to fight off other infections, a health care provider may say that you have AIDS.

How do you get HIV?

If you have anal sex, vaginal sex, or oral sex **without a condom** with someone who has it, you can get it. Some kinds of sex may be riskier than others (e.g. oral sex is lower risk).

You can also get it from sharing needles or works with someone who has the virus. It is passed through body fluids (like blood, vaginal fluid or semen). It can also be passed from mother to baby during birth or breastfeeding.

You can't get it from:

- insect bites
- kissing or hugging
- shaking hands
- sharing food or using the same dish
- sitting on public toilets

How do you know you have it?

Many people don't know they have HIV. You may not have symptoms until your body gets so weak that you get sick from something else.

You may have:

- small sores, blisters, bumps or a rash
- a sore throat
- chills or sweats
- diarrhea
- a fever or swollen glands
- weight loss

The only way to know if you have HIV is to get tested.

What is the test like?

A doctor, nurse or testing counselor will usually take a sample of blood from your finger



or from your arm



or they may swab the inside of your mouth.



How is HIV treated?

There is no cure for HIV or AIDS. Medicines can help reduce the amount of virus in the body. If you have HIV, talk with your health care provider about how you can stay healthy and live longer with the disease.

What can you do to protect yourself?

- You can choose not to have sex
- You can reduce your number of partners if you choose to have sex
- You can use condoms when you have sex
- You can talk with your partner(s) about STDs
- You can avoid sharing needles or other works when using drugs
- You can talk with your health care provider and get tested

To find out more about HIV or AIDS or for information about where you can go to get tested, call (800) 235-2331 or visit www.mass.gov/dph/aids

Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Bureau of Communicable Disease Control
Division of STD Prevention, 305 South Street, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130