

disclosed in this process. If you have been tested for HIV anonymously, public health will not be able to contact you or your sexual partners.

- If you are HIV-positive, there are laws around disclosure (telling your sexual partners you are HIV-positive) and sexual activity. For more information, visit [www.halco.org](http://www.halco.org).

### How is HIV treated?

- There is currently no cure for HIV. There are medications to slow down the progression of the virus, reduce the risk of spreading it, and to deal with the specific health issues that may arise from HIV and AIDS.
- Due to improvements in medication and treatment options, many people with HIV live long healthy lives and do not develop AIDS.

### How can you lower your risk of getting HIV and/or passing it on to your partner(s)?

- Make informed decisions. Talk to your partner(s) about STIs and the use of safer sex tools.
- Use condoms on penises or dildos for vaginal or anal sex, use latex gloves for finger play and fisting, and use condoms/dams for oral sex to lower your chances of passing or getting HIV.
- There are medications for HIV-negative people can take to reduce the risk of getting HIV. Check out our PrEP and PEP pamphlet, or talk to your healthcare provider for more details.
- For info on where to get clean drug use equipment, visit <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/health-wellness-care/health-programs-advice/harm-reduction-supplies-and-locations/>

### For youth ages 13-29

#### Planned Parenthood Toronto Health Services

Offers drop-in and scheduled appointments  
Call 416-961-0113 or visit [www.ppt.on.ca](http://www.ppt.on.ca)

### For youth ages 13-19

#### Teen Health Source

Offers anonymous and confidential sexual health information for teens by teens.  
Text (647) 933-5399, call (416) 961-3200, email [teenhealthsource@ppt.on.ca](mailto:teenhealthsource@ppt.on.ca)  
Chat online and visit [www.teenhealthsource.com](http://www.teenhealthsource.com)

Planned Parenthood Toronto is a United Way Member Agency and a Registered Charity,  
No. 1190-94449-RR0001

Funding for Planned Parenthood Toronto has been provided by the Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network.

## STIs series

# HIV/AIDS

### What is HIV/AIDS?

- HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus, a virus that affects the body's immune system. When the immune system is weakened, the body has less ability to fight off infections. The acronym "PHA" refers to people living with HIV and/or AIDS.
- HIV is the virus that can lead to AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). PHA are diagnosed with AIDS when they become ill from certain types of infections (called opportunistic infections) or cancers.
- Having HIV does not mean you will automatically get AIDS. The amount of time it takes for HIV to progress to a AIDS can take years and depends on factors like financial resources, levels of support, and access to healthcare. With the current medications available for HIV, many PHA do not develop AIDS.

### How do you get HIV?

- Anyone can get HIV, regardless of age, gender, race, class or sexual orientation. HIV exists in every country in the world.
- You can only get HIV from someone that has HIV and has a detectable viral load, which is the amount of virus in the blood. There are medications that help lower this viral load.
- If someone is a PHA and has an undetectable viral load, they cannot give you HIV. This is sometimes referred to as U=U (undetectable=untransmittable)
- HIV is found in certain bodily fluids of someone who has HIV: semen (cum), vaginal\* fluid, anal fluid, blood and breastmilk\*.
- You can get HIV if you have barrierless oral, vaginal or anal sex with someone who is HIV-positive or if you share needles with someone who is HIV-positive and has a detectable viral load

\*We know that these aren't the words everyone uses for their bodies (eg. trans folks), and support you using the language that feels best for you.

- You can get HIV when sharing sex toys with someone who has HIV who has a detectable viral load, and you don't disinfect the toys or put a new condom on them each time a new person uses the toy. A PHA may pass the virus to their baby during delivery or through nursing if they don't have access to or don't take medications that can prevent this.
- You can get HIV from any unsterilized tools used during activities that cut the skin such as tattooing or piercing.
- You cannot get HIV from mosquitoes or from kissing, hugging, touching, sharing towels or toilet seats.

### **How do you know if you have HIV?**

- The only way to find out is to get tested. HIV does not cause symptoms in most people and can still be passed on even when there are no symptoms.
- About a week after getting the virus, some people may experience flu-like symptoms (fever, aches, sore throat, etc.) and/or a body rash that usually go away within 1-2 weeks.

### **How can you get tested for HIV?**

- An HIV test is a blood test that looks for antibodies, a substance that the body produces in response to the HIV virus. A clinician should always get your consent before testing you.
- The time between your possible exposure to HIV (eg. barrierless sexual activity) and when you can get an accurate test result is called a "window period". Most people who have been exposed to HIV will develop enough antibodies for an accurate test result about 4-5 weeks after the exposure.
- However, it may take some people longer to develop enough antibodies after a possible exposure to be detected by certain tests. Each test has a different window period, and if you get tested before these window periods, you may have to be retested again later.
- This also means that the HIV test doesn't test you for any barrierless sex you had during these window periods.
- There are 2 different types of HIV tests, both more than 99% accurate:

#### ***Standard (window period – 6 weeks)***

- Blood is drawn by needle and sent to a lab where it is tested for antibodies to HIV. Getting this test can take about 30 minutes.
- About 1 week later, results for this test will be available. Discuss with your healthcare provider the best way to get these results.

- The lab will also do a P24 antigen test on the sample, which can detect an antigen that develops in your body 2-3 weeks after you got HIV and disappears as your body develops antibodies.

#### ***Rapid/Point of Care (POC) (window period – 3 months)***

- Blood is drawn by a finger prick and tested on the spot. This procedure can take about 40 minutes.
- Results will be given to you during the same visit.
- If the test result is positive, a standard blood draw is done as described on the previous page to confirm the positive result.

### **Where can you get tested for HIV?**

- Planned Parenthood Toronto offers HIV testing for youth ages 13-29. Call 416-961-0113 for more info.
- Call the AIDS & Sexual Health Info line for a list of HIV testing sites at 1-800-668-2437. You can also get tested by your family doctor.
- Ask the clinic which kind of testing they offer:
  - **Nominal testing:** There will be a record of your test and test result will have your name on it. If you need a written record of your test, get a nominal test.
  - **Anonymous testing:** Your test results cannot be traced to you. You do not have to give your real name, address, phone number or health card number.

### **What if you test negative for HIV?**

- If your HIV test result is negative, it means you did not have HIV antibodies at the time of the test. However, if you were tested before the 6 week window period for standard tests or the 3 month window periods for POC testing, you may be asked to come back and be re-tested.

### **What if you test positive for HIV?**

- If your HIV test result is positive, it means you have HIV. A positive result does not mean that you will develop AIDS, and does not tell you when you got HIV. It means that you can carry the virus in your blood, breastmilk, anal fluid, semen or vaginal fluids and can pass it to others through barrierless sex or sharing needles. Pregnant people can pass the virus on to their fetus during pregnancy or their baby while nursing.
- Being HIV-positive isn't the end of your sex or love life. There is a lot of sexual health/relationship support for HIV-positive people.
- HIV is a reportable infection, which means if you test positive, you may be called by a public health nurse to get contact information for current and past sexual partners to encourage them to get tested. Your name is not