

HIV/AIDS



What is HIV?

HIV is the **h**uman **i**mmunodeficiency **v**irus. It is the virus that can lead to acquired immune deficiency syndrome, or AIDS. CDC estimates that about 56,000 people in the United States contracted HIV in 2006.

HIV damages a person's body by destroying specific blood cells, called CD4+ T cells, which are crucial to helping the body fight diseases.

What is AIDS?

AIDS stands for **A**cquired **I**mmunodeficiency **S**ndrome.

Acquired – means that the disease is not hereditary but develops after birth from contact with a disease-causing agent (in this case, HIV).

Immunodeficiency – means that the disease is characterized by a weakening of the immune system.

Syndrome – refers to a group of symptoms that indicate or characterize a disease. In the case of AIDS, this can include the development of certain infections and/or cancers, as well as a decrease in the number of certain specific blood cells, called CD4+ T cells, which are crucial to helping the body fight disease.

Before the development of certain medications, people with HIV could progress to AIDS in just a few years. Currently, people can live much longer - even decades - with HIV before they develop AIDS. This is because of "highly active" combinations of medications that were introduced in the mid-1990s.



How does someone get HIV?

HIV is spread primarily by:

- Not using a condom when having sex with a person who has HIV.
- Having multiple sex partners or the presence of other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) can increase the risk of infection during sex. Unprotected oral sex can also be a risk for HIV transmission, but it is a much lower risk than anal or vaginal sex.
- Sharing needles, syringes, rinse water, or other equipment used to prepare illicit drugs for injection.
- Being born to an infected mother—HIV can be passed from mother to child during pregnancy, birth, or breast-feeding.

What are the symptoms for HIV?

The only way to know if you are infected is to be tested for HIV infection. You cannot rely on symptoms to know whether or not you are infected. Many people who are infected with HIV do not have any symptoms at all for 10 years or more.

The following **may be** warning signs of advanced HIV infection:

rapid weight loss, dry cough, recurring fever or profuse night sweats, profound and unexplained fatigue, swollen lymph glands in the armpits, groin, or neck, diarrhea that lasts for more than a week, white spots or unusual blemishes on the tongue, in the mouth, or in the throat, pneumonia, red, brown, pink, or purplish blotches on or under the skin or inside the mouth, nose, or eyelids, memory loss, depression, and other neurological disorders

For information about HIV/AIDS and how to protect yourself call HAHSTA at (202) 671-4000 or dial 311 for Testing Sites in the District of Columbia.