

## WHAT IS HIV?

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. Let's break this down:



**Human:** It infects humans



**Immunodeficiency:** it weakens the immune system



**Virus:** It is a virus

## WHY IS HIV DANGEROUS?

Your immune system is what protects you from all infections (like other viruses and bacteria). What HIV does is it attacks the cells in your immune system so that you can't fight off these other infections. When you can't fight off infections, you are at risk of losing your battle to them and possibly dying from them.

## CAN I GET RID OF HIV?

Right now, HIV is not curable. However, antiretroviral treatment is available and allows people with HIV to live long, healthy lives where they are not affected by the virus nor able to pass the virus on to other people.

## TESTING FOR HIV

The only way to know that you have HIV is to test for it. HIV doesn't show symptoms until it has progressed to AIDS at which point it is dangerous. To test for HIV, you'll need a blood test or a finger prick test that can be done at your local clinic.

## MYTH #1: HIV AND AIDS ARE THE SAME THING

AIDS stands for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome. Let's break that down.



**Acquired:** you can get it from somewhere



**Immunodeficiency:** it weakens the immune system



**Syndrome:** it causes symptoms

AIDS is symptoms that result from years of untreated HIV. In this way, HIV leads to AIDS but the two are not the same because HIV does not always lead to AIDS.



Untreated HIV Infection



If someone has HIV, the number of viruses in them will grow and grow unless they seek treatment. When there is a lot of virus, the immune system is extremely weak and won't be able to fight off other infections, like a cold. It is when a person has no immune system due to untreated HIV that they have AIDS.

## MYTH #2: YOU CAN'T SHARE ANYTHING WITH SOMEONE WHO HAS HIV

There are only 5 body fluids that you need to be worried about getting HIV from. These include:



Blood



Vaginal Fluid



Semen



Rectal Fluid



Breastmilk

HIV lives in the blood stream, which is why you want to be careful around other people's blood. It can also be found in fluids that come into contact with blood while in the body or may contain small amounts of blood, such as sexual fluids and breastmilk.

This means that the only things you shouldn't share with someone with HIV are needles (any needles that go through the skin – even for tattoos), and breastmilk. You should also refrain from unprotected sexual contact.

HIV only lives outside the body for a couple hours. So even dried blood cannot pass HIV.

You do not need to worry about getting HIV from someone unless you are sharing needles from them or having sex with them.

## MYTH #3: HIV IS A DEATH SENTENCE

It took many years for scientists and doctors to come up with a treatment for HIV. Before that, HIV scared a lot of people because once you had it it would almost certainly end up killing you.

For a couple decades, there has been a treatment for HIV called antiretroviral therapy. It started off as a mix of different pills that had to be taken, sometimes multiple times a day. Now, some treatments are a single pill just once a day. However, HIV still isn't curable.

### TREATMENT

Relieves all symptoms of an issue

### CURE

Completely gets rid of the issue

## MYTH #4 HIV IS A GAY DISEASE

### HISTORY

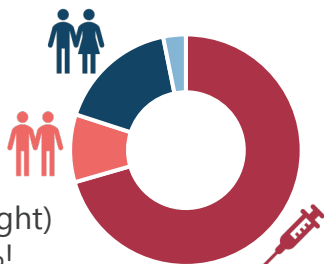
This myth is thanks to the way that HI was first discovered. There was a handful of homosexual men presenting to hospital as very ill but with nothing the doctors had ever seen. It is within these men that they isolated the HIV virus for the first time.

### RISK

Homosexual men and others who participate in anal sex are particularly at risk for HIV due to the increased chance of blood being present during anal sex.

### HOW PEOPLE GET HIV

In SK (2019), 67% of new HIV cases were through drug use while only 9% was through homosexual sex – even less than heterosexual (straight) sex which was 16%!



## MYTH #5 THE ONLY WAY TO PREVENT HIV IS TO AVOID THOSE WHO HAVE IT

There are several ways to protect yourself from HIV. Here are some of those ways:



Don't share needles for drugs or tattoos/piercings



Use condoms if you are having sex with someone who may have HIV



Use PrEP if you are regularly at risk of getting HIV (using IV drugs or having anal sex).



Visit an ER for PEP if you get pricked on a needle or had unprotected sex with someone who has HIV

## WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION ON HIV?

### CATIE

Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange  
<https://www.catie.ca>

### Avert

Global Information on HIV and AIDS  
<https://www.avert.org>

### Know Your Status

Saskatchewan Tailored HIV and Hep C Info  
<http://www.knowyourstatus.ca>

### Sex Life Sask

<https://sexlifesask.ca/living-with-hiv>

### GoFreddie (For PrEP)

<https://www.gofreddie.com>

## TO GET TESTED FOR HIV

Visit your local clinic and Community Health Nurse (CHN) or visit this site to find a testing service near you:

<https://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/health/accessing-health-care-services/health-care-facilities>

## FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HIV AND OTHER TOPICS, FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA



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# MYTH BUSTING HIV

