

YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT INITIATIVES

GET YOUR
LIFE
HIV/AIDS
101

an informational zine



the institute
FOR GAY MEN'S HEALTH

A DIVISION OF
GMHC
GAY MEN'S HEALTH CRISIS
APLA
AIDS Project Los Angeles

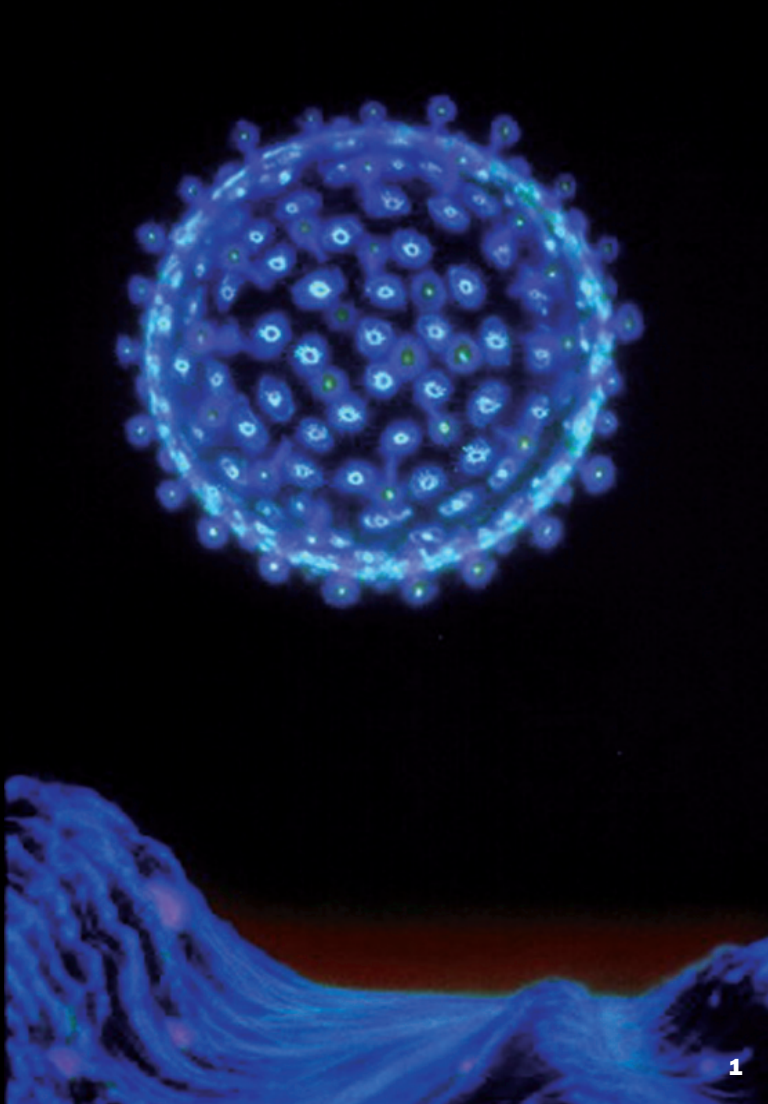


TABLE OF CONTENTS

**GET THE FACTS:
HIV/AIDS BASICS**

4

**WHERE TO GO/HOW TO GO:
TESTING FOR HIV**

11

**LOVING YOUR BODY:
SELF-CARE TIPS AND ADVICE**

14



GET THE FACTS: HIV/AIDS BASICS

HIV and AIDS: Knowing the Difference

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a virus that attacks and breaks down the body's immune system—the “internal defense force” that fights off infection and disease. When the immune system becomes weak, we lose our protection against illness and can develop serious, often life-threatening infections and cancers. HIV is the virus that causes AIDS, it is not AIDS itself.

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is the condition that people with HIV have if they develop one of the serious infections connected with HIV, or if blood tests show that their immune systems have been very badly damaged by the virus.

It normally takes many years before HIV breaks down a person's immune system and causes AIDS. Most people have few, if any, symptoms for several years after they are infected. However, the virus (HIV) is still infectious and may be spread to others in several ways (see page 6 for details).

Symptoms

HIV is categorized by a great number of symptoms. A person infected with HIV may experience any, all, or none of the many symptoms commonly associated with HIV/AIDS. They include:

- ✓ Swollen lymph nodes in the neck, groin or under the arms
- ✓ Diarrhea
- ✓ Unexplained weight loss
- ✓ Fatigue
- ✓ Fever, chills or sweats (especially at night)
- ✓ Visual changes
- ✓ Frequent pneumonias or shortness of breath
- ✓ Rash
- ✓ Flu-like symptoms

Transmission: How Is HIV Transmitted?

People who have HIV can give it to others when certain body fluids—blood, cum (semen), vaginal fluids, or breast milk (to infants only)—pass into another person's body. There are three main ways that our body fluids can get into another person's body:

- ✓ By having unprotected anal or vaginal sex with a person who is infected with HIV. Although still somewhat risky, unprotected oral sex is much less risky than anal or vaginal sex without a condom;

- ✓ By sharing “works” (needles and syringes, cookers, cotton and water) when injecting drugs, hormones or steroids with people infected with HIV;
- ✓ From a mother to her child before birth, during birth, or while breast-feeding. (The chance of having a healthy baby can be greatly increased with proper medical care, so talking about this with a health care provider can be very helpful.)

Kissing, mutual masturbation, and getting another person’s cum (semen) or vaginal fluids on your skin do not spread HIV. HIV cannot enter through the skin unless there is a fresh cut or open sore on the skin. There is no scientific evidence that HIV is passed through saliva, tears, or sweat. Medical procedures in the U.S. are safe and giving blood is completely risk-free. Although there have been some cases of HIV through blood transfusions in the past, tests have been in place for several years to make sure that the blood you get in the hospital has no HIV.

Additionally, the risk of getting HIV increases if you are infected with another sexually transmitted infection (STI). For instance, the inflammation, abrasions and open sores commonly caused by other sexually transmitted infections such as herpes, gonorrhea and chlamydia, can all dramatically increase your chances of getting HIV if condoms are not used. For instance, herpes or syphilis lesions may serve as entryways for HIV. Also, people who have a combination of HIV and other STIs may have more frequent and serious symptoms than those who only have one infection.

CONDOMS



they really work

Who's At Risk?

Anyone can contract HIV, regardless of age, race, sex, class, or sexual orientation. Your risk comes from what you do, and who you do it with. Whether you are part of a community with a high or low infection rate, you can avoid getting HIV. Staying uninfected takes thinking, planning and follow-through. Often it means talking about things that may make you uncomfortable. It can help to practice talking with people you can trust or who are going through the same thing.

Protecting Yourself From HIV: How To Do It

HIV is 100% avoidable only if you abstain from having sex. No current barrier method is 100% effective at preventing HIV infection. However, you can significantly reduce your risk for getting HIV through proper use of latex barriers (male condoms, female condoms and dams) and not sharing works when injecting drugs, steroids or hormones.

Using latex condoms: When used right, condoms seldom break, tear, or slip. You should also use plenty of water-based lubricant to prevent them from breaking. Make sure you use only water-based lubricant, though. You can also use a dry condom, or a flavored one, for oral sex, or cut a condom to the center and open it up to use for oral-anal or oral-vaginal sex. Never re-use a condom.

Using clean needles and bleach: Using a new, clean needle every time you shoot drugs, steroids or hormones provides by far the best protection from getting HIV infection. Also note that Hepatitis C, a serious virus that attacks the liver, is



You have the **POWER**
to protect yourself and others from HIV 9

Protecting Yourself from HIV: How to Do It, continued.

very easily transmitted if you share “works” or any injecting paraphernalia. It’s best if you don’t share any of these things, but if you do, make sure to clean them thoroughly (three times with water, three times with bleach, then again three times with water) before using them.

Using Sheer Glyde Dams®: Sheer Glyde Dams® are large latex squares used for oral-vaginal and oral-anal sex. They are approved by the FDA as effective barriers to STIs, including HIV, and you can find them in medical supply stores and in some adult shops. Although not approved by the FDA, the smaller dental dam or plastic wrap should be used when a Sheer Glyde Dam® is not available. When using a dam, be sure it covers the entire vulva (clitoris and vaginal opening) or the anus and that you hold it at both edges. Be careful not to turn the dam inside out while using it.

Using female condoms: The female condom is a loose-fitting polyurethane sheath that women can insert in their vaginas and use for protection against HIV. Unlike traditional latex condoms and dams, the female condom is safe to use with oil-based lubricants since it is made of polyurethane. The female condom can be inserted up to 8 hours before sex, has rings at both ends to hold it in place, and can be lubricated with oil-based lubricants that stay wet longer. This kind of condom takes practice to use and is more expensive than a latex condom. Some men have also used the female condom for anal sex, though it has not been tested or approved by the FDA for this use.

Remember, no matter if you’re using a condom or a dam, avoid using lubricants containing nonoxynol-9, which can irritate the inside lining of the urethra, anus and vagina, and can therefore greatly increase your risk of getting HIV.

WHERE TO GO/HOW TO GO: TESTING BASICS

Knowing your HIV status can empower you to make the best decisions about your health and the kind of sex that you are having. When you know your status, you can better protect yourself and your sex partner from getting or giving HIV. If your test result is positive it will give you the opportunity to learn about different treatment options to maintain your health and well-being. Whether your HIV test result is positive or negative, you can take control of your life.



Today, there are several types of tests that use blood or urine to detect antibodies to HIV. Described below are the three most commonly used HIV antibody tests. Each is considered better than 99% effective at detecting the antibodies to HIV.

It is important to know that the HIV antibody test does not detect HIV itself. Rather, it looks for the antibodies that the human immune system produces in response to HIV. It can take the body up to 3 months to produce enough antibodies that can be detected by the test. Therefore it is recommended that a person wait at least 3 full months from the time they may have been exposed to HIV before getting an HIV test. This 3-month interval is known as the window period.

Rapid HIV Test (OraQuick)

The OraQuick test uses a small amount of blood (1 drop) usually collected from a finger prick. Your results can be ready in anywhere from 20 minutes to 1 hour. If a person's test results come back HIV-positive, it is only considered a preliminary positive result. Although the test is extremely accurate, additional testing for confirmation is required to confirm the results. A standard blood draw is generally encouraged as the test of choice for confirmatory testing. The turnaround time for confirmatory test results can take anywhere from 3 days to 2 weeks.

Standard HIV Blood Draw

This type of HIV test requires that a tube of blood be drawn from the person's arm. Results can take anywhere from 3 days (at some private clinics) to 2 weeks. Each testing site is different, so you might want to ask what their turnaround time is for results.

Oral HIV Test (Orasure)

This type of HIV test requires the use of a swab to collect oral fluid (officially, oral mucosal transudate, or "OMT") from inside the cheek. Results can take anywhere from 2 days to 2 weeks. Again, each testing site is different so you might want to ask what their turnaround time is for test results.

Places where you can receive information about a confidential HIV test. Some of these places also offer free testing*:

NEW YORK RESOURCES

GMHC David Geffen Center*
www.gmhc.org
(212) 367-1100

Latino Commission on AIDS*
www.latinoaids.org
(212) 675-3288

Callen-Lorde Community Health Center*
www.callen-lorde.org
(212) 271-7200

Hispanic AIDS Forum*
www.hafnyc.org
(212) 563-4500

Gay Men of African Descent*
www.gmad.org
(212) 828-1697

People of Color in Crisis*
www.pocc.org
(718) 857-5900

Anonymous HIV Testing provided
through the NYC Dept. of Health
<http://www.nyc.gov/nyc.departmentofhealth>
1-800-TALK-HIV (1-800-621-5448)

The Hetrick-Martin Institute
www.hmi.org
(212) 674-2400

LOS ANGELES RESOURCES

Altamed Health Services Corp.*
Men's HIV Prevention/Education Program
www.altamed.org
(323) 307-0100

Common Ground*
www.commongroundwestside.org
(310) 314-5480

Asian Pacific AIDS Intervention Team*
www.apaitonline.org
(213) 553-1840

Bienestar Human Services, Inc.*
La Casa Gay and Lesbian Center
www.bienestar.org
(323) 727-7897

Bienestar Human Services, Inc.*
La Casa Gay and Lesbian Center
www.bienestar.org
(323) 727-7897

L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center*
www.laglc.org
(323) 993-7501

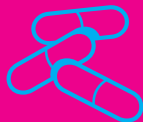
* As of October 2004, these places offer FREE HIV testing.

LOVING YOUR BODY: SELF-CARE TIPS AND ADVICE FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV

There is no cure for HIV/AIDS. It is a serious disease. When it comes down to it, no one will be more responsible for taking care of you than you. While there are services and people you may need in your life, ultimately it is you that must run the show. If you are HIV positive, here are some ways to take care of yourself:

- 1) Have a support network to be with you in good and bad times. Consider joining a support group or connect with other people who are living healthily with HIV. Consider going to a meeting and finding supportive life-long friends. (See the list of resources on page 13.)
- 2) Find a health care provider with whom you can build a relationship. Studies show that people with HIV who have a strong partnership with their doctor live longer and have a better quality of life. If you do not have a medical care provider or you do not have health insurance, there are still opportunities for you to receive the excellent health care that you need and deserve. (See the list of resources on page 13.)

- 3) Take your HIV medications as prescribed by your doctor! Starting HIV meds is strongly recommended, regardless of your T-cell count and viral load if you have any AIDS-related symptoms like fever or weight loss, or if you have a T-cell count of less than 200. Also, remember to consider that T-cell count and viral load are not the only things you need to concern yourself with.
- 4) Eat healthy! Maintain good nutrition and take vitamins. Be sure to try to manage your cholesterol, triglycerides, blood sugar, and liver enzymes.
- 5) Exercise! An exercised body is a healthy body. Studies show that exercising increases the number of white blood cells. It can also make you feel better by reducing stress. Proper exercise can improve the immune system, increase appetite, metabolism and bone density, and allow you to perform greater tasks with greater ease.
- 6) Remember: You are not alone. There are many, many people with HIV/AIDS who are living and maintaining healthy, exciting and fulfilling lives. You, too, can be one of them.



REMEMBER THESE FOUR THINGS ...

Regardless of your HIV status, self-care is crucially important.

- 1) Don't put yourself at risk for HIV infection. Always be aware of the ways in which HIV is transmitted and make sure you always protect yourself by using condoms. If you inject drugs, steroids or hormones, always use a clean needle and syringe and never share them.
- 2) Visit your doctor regularly. Frequent check-ups help take care of smaller problems and prevent them from becoming much bigger ones.
- 3) Maintain a healthy state of mind. Day to day, young people are under a lot of stress. Seek counseling if you think it might help—it's not for the sick, it's for the smart.
- 4) Explore and enhance your spiritual health and be at ease with your body, your mind and your soul. Focus on the connection between your physical well-being, your inner thoughts and feelings, and your sense of self.

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a collaboration



APLA
The David Geffen Center
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www.apla.org

GMHC
The Tisch Building
119 W. 24th Street
New York, NY 10011
www.gmhc.org