

HIV and AIDS

What Is HIV and AIDS?

- Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is the virus that causes the disease called Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS).
- HIV attacks the immune system so that it cannot fight infections. Once the system is weakened enough, then AIDS is diagnosed.
- There is no cure for HIV infection.

How do I get an HIV infection?

- HIV can be spread through contact with blood, semen, vaginal secretions, or breast milk. This may happen:
 - by having unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex
 - by sharing sex toys, razors, toothbrushes that may have been used by an infected person
 - by sharing drug use equipment such as pipes or needles
 - through pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding
 - by the use of dirty equipment for tattoos, piercings, or acupuncture
 - accidental contact with an infected object such as a needle stick
- The risk of infection through blood transfusion is low, since all blood and blood products in Canada are screened for HIV.
- **Your chances of getting HIV are greater if you have another sexually transmitted infection (STI).**
- HIV is **not** spread by mosquitoes, or the saliva, sweat, tears, urine, or feces of an infected person **unless there is blood.**

How do I know if I have HIV?

- You may not have symptoms for many years.
- You may have flu-like symptoms 2–4 weeks after being exposed, which then goes away.
- The following symptoms may occur once the immune system has weakened:

- weight loss without trying	- skin rashes	- sore throat
- tired	- diarrhea	- swollen glands
- fever or night sweats	- vomiting	- headaches
- joint/muscle pain	- no appetite	- yeast infections
- Testing is the only way to know for sure if you are infected with the virus.
- Once AIDS sets in, you may get life threatening infections, dementia, vomiting, diarrhea, or cancers.

How do I get tested?

- Ask for a blood test for HIV from a doctor, STD or Family Planning Clinic. It is free and confidential.
- You will be asked to return to get your results from the doctor or nurse, even if it is negative.
- It can take 3–6 months for HIV to be detected in a blood test, so a second or third test may be needed.



How can I prevent the spread of HIV?

- Abstinence (not having sex) may be your best choice.
- Practice “**safer sex**”. Always use condoms during vaginal, anal, and oral sex.
- Condoms with nonoxynol-9 may cause skin irritation, making it easier to get HIV.
- Use a dental dam during oral sex on women.
- Do not share sex toys.
- Limit the number of sexual partners you have.
- Ask your partner about his or her sexual history.
- Get tested for STIs before having any sexual activity with a new partner.
- If you think you have been infected with an STI, see a healthcare provider.
- Do not have sex with an infected person. You cannot tell just by looking at the person.
- Tell your partner if you have an infection.
- Stay away from sex practices that cause injury to body tissues.
- Never share IV needles or supplies.
- Be sure that tools to be used on you for tattoos and body piercing have been sterilized.
- If you ever find a needle or syringe, call the Fire Department to pick it up.
- If you use IV drugs, call Calgary Health Link to find out about places to exchange your used needles for clean ones and to learn more about how you can reduce your risk of getting HIV.
- Get information, guidance, and support.

Sexual Decision Making

- You have the right to choose whether or not to have intercourse.
- If you choose to have sex, be sure to protect yourself against pregnancy and STIs.
- Talk to your partner about these choices before you have sex!

For More Information Call:

Sexual and Reproductive Health

Education/Health Promotion 403-955-6515

Clinical Services

Sheldon M. Chumir Health Centre 5th floor, 1213-4th St. SW 403-955-6500

South Calgary Health Centre 31 Sunpark Plaza SE 403-943-9510

Sunridge Professional Building 406, 2675-36 St NE 403-944-7666

STD Clinic

Sheldon M. Chumir Health Centre 5th floor, 1213-4th St. SW 403-955-6700

For 24-hour nurse advice and health information, call Health Link Alberta at 403-943-LINK (5465) in the Calgary area or 1-866-408-LINK (5465) toll-free.

Visit www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/programs/sexualhealth for more sexual health information.

This material is designed for information purposes only. It should not be used in place of medical advice, instruction and/or treatment. If you have specific questions, please consult your doctor or appropriate healthcare professional.