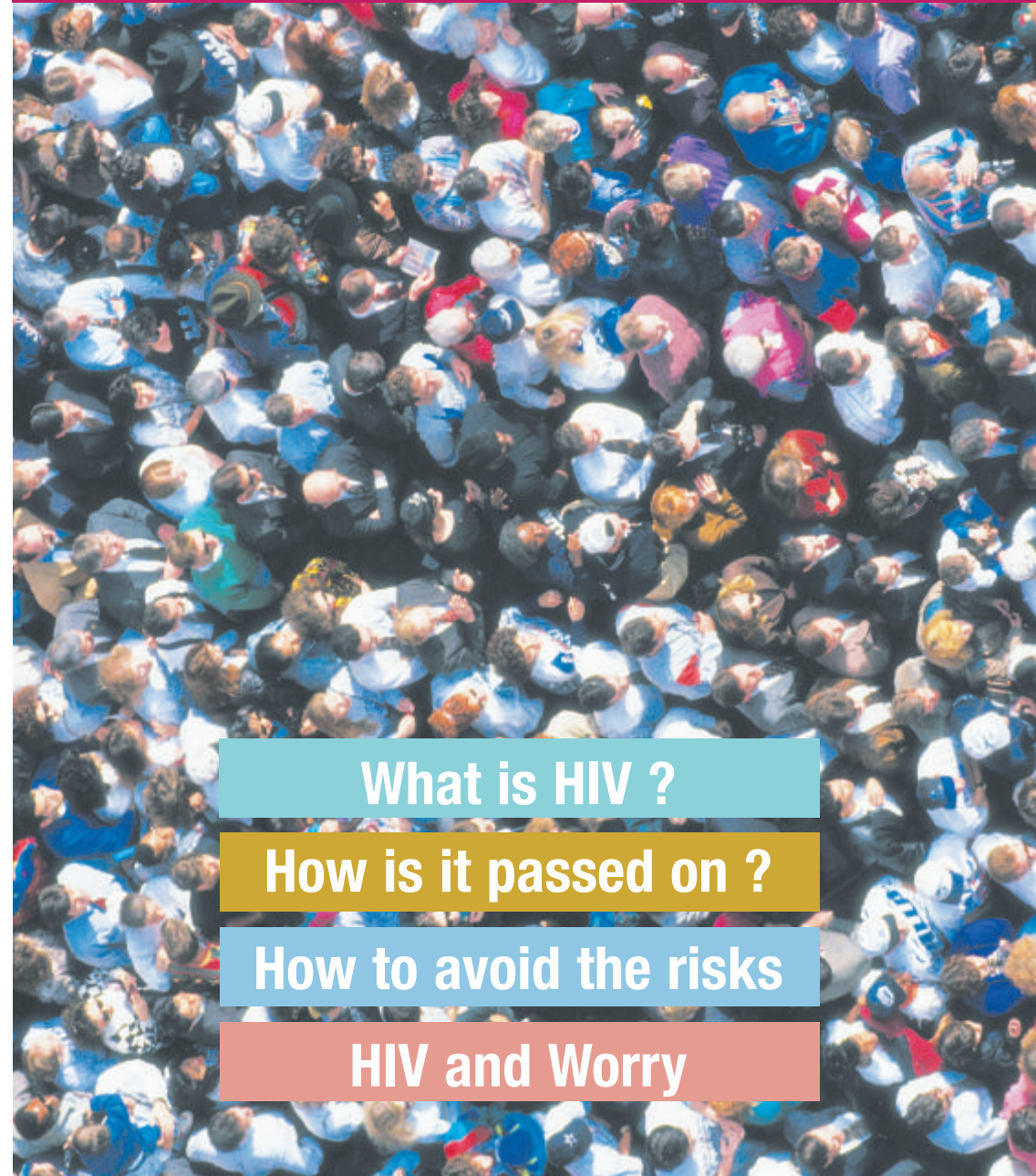


Information on HIV

For further information call
The Drugs/HIV Helpline
1800 459 459



What is HIV ?

How is it passed on ?

How to avoid the risks

HIV and Worry



What is HIV?



HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus.

If HIV gets into your body it can affect the immune system and how you fight off sickness or infections.

What does being HIV positive mean?

Your immune system creates different types of antibodies to help to fight against different types of infections. If HIV gets into your blood, your body will produce **HIV antibodies** to try to fight against it.

When a **HIV test** is done, the blood is checked to see if there are any HIV antibodies present. If HIV antibodies are found, that means that your body has been exposed to HIV and that it has gotten into your blood.

You are HIV positive, if the HIV test, also known as the HIV antibody test, finds HIV antibodies.

If you are HIV positive, one way of checking the effect that HIV is having on your body is to check the number of **T-cells** that are in your immune system. When you have less T-cells your immune system is weaker and this means that if you get sick it can be harder to get better. If a person is HIV positive they need to get their T-cell levels checked regularly, so that their doctor will know how they are.

Along with checking T-cell levels, doctors will check the amount of HIV in the patient's body. This is called the **viral load**. The higher the viral load, the more active the disease is in the body. If viral load levels are too high doctors may suggest taking medication to lower them.



HIV and Worry



HIV and Worry

The thought of being HIV positive can cause a lot of worry for some people. Too much worry can be very distressing and can have a big impact on your life.

Worry can cause some of the following things:

- Going for HIV tests over and over again, even though you have been given a negative HIV test result
- Worrying that you have put yourself at risk when you have not

- Feeling physically unwell
- Having problems with your relationships or other aspects of your life

If you are very anxious, talking through your fears and worries with a doctor or counsellor may help.

Drugs / HIV Helpline

The helpline provides free and confidential information, support, guidance and referral for anyone with a question or concern related to HIV, sexual health and / or drug and alcohol use.





How is it passed on?

HIV can travel and be passed on in four body fluids:

- **Blood**
- **Semen**
- **Vaginal fluids**
- **Breast milk**

These infected body fluids have to pass from one person's blood system into another person's blood system in large enough amounts for HIV to be passed on.

Three things have to happen for HIV to be passed on:

- 1) One person has to be HIV positive
and
- 2) HIV has to get out of their body (in their blood, semen, vaginal fluids or breast milk)
and
- 3) HIV has to be able to get into another person's blood

The main ways that HIV is passed on:

- If you share drug-using equipment (not just needles) where blood might be involved, you risk getting HIV, as well as viruses such as Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C.
- During sex where blood, semen or vaginal fluids get into the blood system through the anus, vagina, top of the penis or cuts.
- From a HIV positive mother to her baby during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding.



Unprotected vaginal sex and anal sex carry a risk of HIV being passed on. Why?

- The walls inside the vagina and anus can tear during sex
- HIV can sometimes pass through those walls
- Semen may stay inside someone's vagina or anus for a while after sex

Unprotected oral sex carries a risk of HIV being passed on, but it is a lower risk than vaginal or anal sex. Why?

- The walls of the inside of your mouth are thicker than the walls inside of the vagina or anus. This means that HIV cannot get through these walls as easily.
- If you get blood, semen or vaginal fluids inside your mouth, it will not stay there for long, because you will swallow it or spit it out.

This means that risky fluids will not be in the mouth for long and so there is less chance for HIV to get into your blood.

- Your mouth and throat are not openings into your blood system, unless you have a cut, sore or infection. So, be careful if brushing your teeth before you have oral sex.

REMEMBER

You may be putting yourself at risk of sexually transmitted infections, which can be more contagious than HIV, if you do not use a condom during sex. Those infections include Chlamydia, Genital Herpes, Genital Warts, Gonorrhoea, Hepatitis B, NSU (Non - Specific Urethritis), Syphilis and Trichomonas. Having a Sexually Transmitted Infection makes you more vulnerable to HIV.



How to avoid the risks



Use condoms correctly during sex.

1. Use a good quality condom. Check for the 'CE' mark or 'Kite' mark as proof of its quality.
2. Condoms age. Check that it is not out of date.
3. Use only one condom at a time. Using two at a time increases the risk of a rip occurring.
4. Read instructions carefully before using a condom.
5. If you use lubricants, use a water-based one such as 'KY Jelly' rather than oil-based ones like Vaseline which could weaken the rubber of the condom.
6. Make sure that the condom you use is designed for the sexual activity that you are planning.

REMEMBER

Drugs and alcohol can impair your judgement. So, you may take more risks and increase your chances of getting HIV, Hepatitis and Sexually Transmitted Infections.

If you are going to use heroin, cocaine or other drugs, do not share needles, spoons, filters, straws or any other equipment that you are using

If you want to discuss the safety of your drug use or to find out about your nearest needle exchange, call: The Drugs/HIV Helpline 1800 459 459

If someone accidentally pricks themselves with a used needle, it is advisable to do the following:

- Bleed the wound – do not suck it. Squeeze as much blood out of the wound as you can, while holding it under running water.
- Go to your nearest Hospital Emergency Department as soon as possible and discuss testing with them

Women who are diagnosed HIV positive and are pregnant can be treated with antiretroviral medication to help reduce the chance of their baby being HIV positive.

For more information on this, talk with your Midwife or Doctor.



What is the difference between HIV and AIDS?

If someone is HIV positive and their viral load keeps getting higher and their T-cell levels keep getting lower, they may, in time, develop some serious illnesses.

A HIV positive person is said to have **AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome)** when they have a number of specific infections or certain tumours. It may take many years for HIV to progress to AIDS and for some people it may never happen, particularly as HIV treatments continue to improve.

What is the Window Period?

The **window period** is the time between a person's exposure to HIV and the time that HIV antibodies show up in the blood. It can take up to 3 months for this to happen. If you decide to go for a test before this time, you may have to go back again when 3 months have passed for another test and a final result.

HIV and Sex

Sex can be enjoyable and safe and carry no risk of HIV transmission, as long as no blood, semen or vaginal fluids are passed from one person to another. Using a condom correctly during sex is one way of reducing the risk of HIV transmission from one partner to another.

