

ABOUT HIV DISEASE

What are HIV and AIDS?

HIV is an abbreviation for *human immunodeficiency virus*. Over time, this virus weakens the body's ability to fight off infections and cancers. But it is possible to have the virus for years before any signs of illness occur.

AIDS is *acquired immunodeficiency syndrome*. AIDS is diagnosed in people living with HIV when the virus has resulted in: diagnosis of one or more illnesses in a set of "AIDS-defining" illnesses; a reduction in the number of CD4 cells (which are specialized cells of the immune system that protect against infection); and on-going health problems.

You can have HIV disease and not have AIDS, but anyone who has been diagnosed with AIDS has HIV.

How is HIV transmitted?

HIV lives in blood and other body fluids (semen, vaginal fluids, and breast milk). HIV can be transmitted through the sharing of injection equipment (needles, syringes), sex (vaginal, anal, and oral), and from a mother to her fetus/infant during pregnancy, labor, or through breast-feeding. It is also possible, though very rare, for HIV to be transmitted through a blood transfusion. Not sharing injection equipment and correct and consistent use of condoms significantly reduce the risk of HIV infection.

HIV is not transmitted through hugging, holding hands, sharing a meal, working, dancing, swimming, or sharing a ride with someone who has HIV. And HIV is not spread through contact with the tears, sweat, or saliva of a person with HIV.

Is there a cure for HIV?

No. HIV infection is a life-threatening, infectious disease for which there is no cure.

Are there medicines for HIV?

Yes. There are medicines that can keep you healthy if you are infected with HIV. However, no matter how effective these medicines are, they are not a cure for HIV. The anti-HIV medicines work to reduce the amount of virus in the body. However, the virus is never totally eliminated from the body.

How many people in the U.S. have HIV?

At the end of 2003, over one million people (an estimated 1,039,000 to 1,185,000) were living with HIV. This estimate includes people who also have an AIDS diagnosis.

How many people in the U.S. have died from AIDS?

For the years 1981 to 2005, an estimated 530,756 deaths in the U.S. are attributed to AIDS.

For more information or to obtain a current list of local testing sites, please contact us at:

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