

HIV – What you need to know.

What is HIV?

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a virus that attacks the body's immune system.

In the later stages of HIV infection where the immune system has become damaged, people are at risk of other health problems. Therefore, it is important to **get tested** and get treatment at the early stage of infection.

How is the virus passed on?

The virus is passed on through exchanging bodily fluids such as blood, semen or vaginal secretions in the following ways:

- Unprotected sex - vaginal, anal and oral sex
- Sharing needles to inject drugs
- Birth or breastfeeding: a mother can pass the virus to her baby
- HIV can affect anyone regardless of gender or sexual preference

Looking after yourself

It is important that you protect yourself from sexually transmitted infections (STI's) like HIV **by using condoms** when having sex and **test yourself regularly**. You can get condoms for free from the NHS.

HIV Treatment

Treatment and care are so advanced, if you are diagnosed with HIV and on effective treatment, you can live a normal life.

Research has evidenced that people on effective HIV treatment whose virus is controlled cannot pass on HIV to others.

U = U undetectable means untransmittable.

This means that: you can have children, go to work, socialise, be active, live as long a lifespan as someone without HIV.

HIV Testing

The only way to know if you have HIV is through a **blood test**.

Testing and treatment for HIV and other STI's is **free and confidential**.

You can access information on HIV and Sexual Health on our website:

www.letstalkaboutit.nhs.uk

If you are worried or want to talk to someone about HIV, you can speak to a trusted adult, your GP, a Pharmacist or call Sexual Health on 0300 300 2016.



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