

HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS (HIV) AND PREGNANCY

What is HIV?

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a virus that attacks the body's immune system allowing other infections to occur. Advanced HIV infection is called Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

HIV can be spread when the body fluids (blood, semen, vaginal fluids, and breast milk) of an infected person enter your body. In adults, the virus is most often spread through sexual contact or by sharing needles. Most children who are infected get the virus from their infected mothers during pregnancy, at the time of birth, or through breastfeeding. With the current screening guidelines, spread through blood transfusion is rare.

I've recently been exposed to someone with HIV. What should I do?

An exposure is defined as direct contact with the blood or body fluids of an infected person. Contact includes touching the blood or body fluids when you have open cuts or wounds (that are less than 24 hours old), splashes of blood or body fluids into the eyes or mouth, being stuck with a needle or other sharp object that has blood on it, or having sex or sharing needles with someone with HIV. A baby can get HIV from its infected mother during childbirth and from drinking breast milk from an infected mother.

Everyone who has an exposure to a person infected with HIV should have a blood test to determine whether or not they have been infected with the virus. The test should be repeated 3 months after exposure to completely rule out infection.

How will this exposure affect my pregnancy?

All pregnant women should be tested for HIV early in their pregnancy. If a woman is infected with HIV during her pregnancy, there is a chance that she could give the infection to her baby. About 25% of babies of infected mothers who do not receive antiretroviral treatment become infected, whereas, about 2% become infected when the mother receives antiretroviral treatment. The infant can become infected anytime during pregnancy, but infection usually happens just before or during delivery. **Women who are infected with HIV should not breastfeed their babies, because HIV can be transmitted via breast milk.**

HIV infection can be diagnosed in most infants by 1 month of age, and in all infants by 6 months using special viral diagnostic tests. These tests look for the HIV virus produced by the body instead of antibodies to the virus; most adults are diagnosed using an antibody test. Because newborns have some of their mother's antibodies to HIV in their blood for a time, the special tests need to be used.

How can I tell if I'm infected with HIV?

The only way to determine whether you are infected is to be tested for HIV infection. You cannot rely on symptoms to know whether or not you are infected with HIV. Most people who are infected with HIV do not have any symptoms for many years.

What are the HIV/AIDS symptoms?

The symptoms listed below are not specific for HIV and may have other causes. Most persons with HIV have no symptoms at all for several years. The only way to determine whether you are infected is to be tested for HIV infection.

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Early symptoms (weeks to months after exposure)

- Flu-like illness
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Rash

Late symptoms (years after exposure)

- Persistent fevers
- Night sweats
- Prolonged diarrhea
- Unexplained weight loss
- Purple bumps on skin or inside the mouth and nose
- Chronic fatigue
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Recurrent respiratory infections

I have had a blood test for HIV. What do the results of the blood test show?

There are several steps to test for HIV. They are all done on the same sample. First an enzyme immune assay (EIA) is performed. If negative, the person has no HIV antibodies. If the EIA is positive, a Western blot test is done to confirm the result. The person is considered HIV-infected if the Western blot is positive. Early in the infection it is possible to have a positive EIA and a negative Western blot test, so some people may need to have further testing or retesting in a month's time.

Is there a way I can keep from being infected with HIV during my pregnancy?

- Use latex condoms during sex. Limit the number of partners.
- Wear gloves when handling blood and body fluids.
- Clean and disinfect contaminated objects or surfaces and wear gloves. (See pgs 34-35.)
- Wash hands after removing gloves.
- DO NOT share personal care items, such as toothbrushes, razors, or nail clippers.
- DO NOT share needles to inject drugs or to perform tattoos or body piercings.

For more information, call the Minnesota Department of Health at (651) 201-5414, call your local health department, or the Minnesota AIDS Project hotline at (612) 373-AIDS (Twin Cities), (800) 248-AIDS (statewide), (612) 373-2465 TTY metro, (888) 820-2437 TTY statewide