

### WHY DO PEOPLE FIND IT HARD TO TELL OTHERS THEY ARE HIV POSITIVE?

HIV positive people may have fears about how others will react so will prefer to keep their HIV status to themselves or think carefully about who they tell. Many people living with HIV worry that friends, family

or colleagues will reject them or that they will experience prejudice. Some people have had bad experiences in disclosing and may experience discrimination at work, within their community and even in healthcare settings (e.g. GPs and dentists). Everyone's experience is different.

### WHAT'S IT LIKE LIVING WITH HIV?

Many people find it difficult to come to terms with their diagnosis but some people living with HIV feel empowered and find they actually look after themselves, eat better, and lead a healthier lifestyle after receiving an HIV diagnosis.

Excellent treatments are available and most people on HIV medication now just take one or two pills daily. They may experience side effects such as nausea, diarrhoea and weight loss, but these are usually temporary and are increasingly well managed.

Sadly, HIV stigma still exists in society. It can be difficult for some people living with HIV to begin or maintain relationships as it can be hard to disclose to new partners and some partners may find it difficult to cope with. Mental health can also be affected by the impact of stigma, as well as coming to terms with a long term condition.

Many people living with HIV continue to lead active and fulfilling lives – HIV shouldn't stop someone from working, having relationships or having children.

### WHAT IF SOME ONE TELLS ME THEY HAVE HIV?

If someone has told you they are HIV positive they are placing trust in you. It is very important that you respect this and don't pass on this information without their permission.

There is no need to treat someone living with HIV any differently to anyone else, and your reaction can make a big difference to how they feel about their HIV status. If the person with HIV is a sexual partner you should use a condom to protect yourself from HIV.

Remember, under the Equality Act (2010), it is illegal to discriminate against someone because they are HIV positive.

### FIND OUT THE FACTS ABOUT HIV AND HOW YOU CAN ACT AWARE AT [WWW.HIVAWARE.ORG.UK](http://WWW.HIVAWARE.ORG.UK)

WITH THANKS TO OUR FUNDER WHO SUPPORTED THE DEVELOPMENT OF THESE RESOURCES



NAT is the UK's leading charity dedicated to transforming society's response to HIV. We provide fresh thinking, expertise and practical resources. We champion the rights of people living with HIV and campaign for change.

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# WHAT EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT...



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## WHAT ARE HIV AND AIDS?

HIV is a virus that attacks the body's immune system. There are effective treatments available that can keep the virus under control and the immune system healthy. A person with HIV is considered to have AIDS when the

immune system is so weak it can no longer fight off diseases it would normally cope with. As long as HIV is diagnosed early and is treated, most people with HIV will not develop AIDS, and if they do, with treatment they can recover.

**DID YOU KNOW?** In 2013 only 0.3% of people with HIV in the UK were diagnosed with AIDS.

## HOW IS HIV TREATED?

There is no cure for HIV, but very good treatment is available which will keep the amount of virus in the blood very low, and the body healthy. People on HIV treatment can live healthy, active lives. If diagnosed early, a person living with HIV in the UK can expect a normal life span.

## HOW IS HIV PASSED ON?

HIV is passed on through semen, vaginal and anal secretions, blood and breast milk.

**DID YOU KNOW?** The most common ways for HIV to be passed on are:

- Anal or vaginal sex without a condom (reported for 95% of people diagnosed with HIV in the UK last year)
- Sharing needles, syringes or other drug injecting equipment
- From an HIV positive mother to her child during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding (BUT, in the UK only 0.5% of babies born to HIV positive mothers have HIV as treatment available during pregnancy is so effective)

Oral sex carries a much lower risk than penetrative sex, but HIV can still be passed on if the person performing oral sex has cuts, bleeding gums or ulcers in their mouth which come into contact with those bodily fluids listed above.

HIV is not passed on through: Kissing or touching, spitting, coughing, sneezing, sharing toilet seats, swimming pools, biting or coming into contact with a discarded needle.

**DID YOU KNOW?** 70-90% of people experience severe flu-like symptoms in early HIV infection, known as 'primary infection'. These most commonly include a fever, rash on the chest, sore throat, fatigue, diarrhoea and loss of appetite - an unusual combination in an otherwise healthy person. These symptoms disappear after 2-3 weeks and then a person can appear healthy for many years. Not everybody experiences these symptoms, so never assume you don't have HIV just because you don't get them.

## COULD I BE AT RISK OF HIV?

If you are sexually active, or share needles or other injecting equipment you could be at risk of HIV. Some groups in the UK have higher rates of HIV, particularly gay and bisexual men and black African men and women. It is recommended that people in these groups who are sexually active, and their sexual partners, test regularly for HIV.

## HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF FROM HIV?

Always use a condom when having vaginal or anal sex. For anal sex always use water-based lubricant. Never share needles, or other injecting equipment. You may also want to use a condom or dental dam for oral sex, although the HIV transmission risk is much lower.

Always follow the instructions and use a condom that meets the British Standard and carries the Kitemark symbol. You can get free condoms from a sexual health clinic, which you can locate at [www.fpa.org.uk/Findaclinic](http://www.fpa.org.uk/Findaclinic)

## WHAT DO I DO IF I THINK I HAVE PUT MYSELF AT RISK?

If it is under 72 hours since possible exposure to HIV you can ask for Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP). This is a course of medication which may stop you from becoming infected. You can get this from a sexual health clinic or A&E. PEP has to be taken for a month and can cause side effects. It is not

a substitute for condom use. Find out more at [www.tht.org.uk/pep](http://www.tht.org.uk/pep). If you are unsure whether you've put yourself at risk, take our online quiz at [www.HIVaware.org.uk](http://www.HIVaware.org.uk)

## WHY SHOULD I GET TESTED?

If you think you have put yourself at risk of HIV, take an HIV test to find out your HIV status.

Getting tested is the only way to know whether you have HIV, and it's better to know as then you can start treatment. If you are diagnosed early, effective treatment can keep you healthy and can also help protect your partner from HIV. If HIV is diagnosed late, you are more likely to become seriously ill and treatment may be less effective.

## WHERE CAN I GET AN HIV TEST?

You can get a free and confidential test at your local sexual health clinic, which you can locate at [www.fpa.org.uk/Findaclinic](http://www.fpa.org.uk/Findaclinic). You can also ask your GP or private doctor about a test, though the results will be kept on your medical record. There are also tests you can take at home; one, where you have to post the test to a lab, which then contact you with the result. There are also tests which will give you a result at home. Seek advice if you wish to use one of these tests; for more information go to [www.HIVaware.org.uk](http://www.HIVaware.org.uk)

**DID YOU KNOW?** It is now possible to reliably detect HIV from one month after infection as HIV tests have improved enormously in recent years.

The most common test involves taking a sample of blood and sending it off to a lab, but there are also HIV tests available that involve a finger-prick or use saliva.

**DID YOU KNOW?** Around 100,000 people are living with HIV in the UK and between 6,000 and 7,000 people are newly diagnosed each year. Approximately 24% of people living with HIV in the UK don't know they have HIV.