

**Who is at  
risk of HIV  
Infection?**

**How do I  
know if I have  
infection?**

# *Empowered 4 Life*

**Know The Facts About HIV**

**How can I  
protect  
myself from  
HIV infection?**

**Action  
Health Incorporated**

# Contents

1. What's the difference between HIV and AIDS?
2. How long does it take for HIV to cause AIDS?
3. How is HIV transmitted?
4. How is HIV not transmitted?
5. What's an STI?
6. Why are sexually transmitted infections important in HIV prevention?
7. Does an STI increase the risk of HIV infection?
8. What are the signs of STIs
9. How can I protect myself from HIV infection?
10. How do I know if I have HIV?
11. What is the HIV test?
12. What is the "Window Period"?
13. What are the benefits of having a blood test for HIV?
14. Who is at risk of HIV infection?
15. How do I assess my risk of HIV?
16. Why are young women at a higher risk of HIV infection than young men?
17. Is there a cure for AIDS?
18. What is the ABC...DE approach to HIV prevention?
19. What advice can be given to people living with HIV/AIDS?
20. How can the community help people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA)?

# Young People and HIV & AIDS

Young people between the ages of 15 to 29 years account for 3 out of 5 of the new HIV infections recorded in Nigeria annually. The main mode of transmission of HIV infection among young people is through sexual activity. The use of drugs or alcohol also increases the likelihood of engaging in high-risk sexual behaviors that make people more vulnerable to HIV.

This is why young people need to take the threat of HIV infection seriously. In order to protect yourself, you need to know the facts, and know how to avoid becoming infected. Each person has to take responsibility for himself/ herself by adopting a risk-free lifestyle. This is the key to ensuring that you remain HIV-free.

# What's the difference between HIV and AIDS?

HIV stands for the 'Human Immunodeficiency Virus' and AIDS stands for the 'Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome'. HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. AIDS is a serious condition in which the body's defences against some illnesses are broken down. This means that people with AIDS can get many different kinds of diseases which a healthy person's body would normally fight off quite easily.

# How long does it take HIV to cause AIDS?

The length of time between being infected with HIV and being diagnosed with AIDS varies and also depends on a number of different things including the person's overall health status and their health related behaviour, as well as, access to drug therapies.

# How is HIV transmitted?

HIV is transmitted through:

- Unprotected sexual intercourse (anal, vaginal and oral) with an infected partner. Having sexual intercourse without using a condom, with someone who is infected with HIV puts you at risk of HIV infection.
- Contaminated blood and blood products (transfusion of infected blood, and infected blood through organ transplant)
- Contaminated needles, syringes and other piercing instruments
- Mother-to-child-transmission (MTCT): during pregnancy via the placenta, during birth, from breast milk.

# How is HIV not transmitted?

HIV cannot be transmitted through:

- Casual or everyday contact such as shaking hands or hugging.
- Sharing eating utensils, living in the same room or sitting with a person infected with HIV
- Sweat, tears, vomit, feces and urine do contain small amounts of HIV, but not in sufficient enough quantity to transmit the disease.
- Mosquitoes and other insects do not transmit HIV.

# What's an STI?

A Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) is an infection that is spread through sexual contact. And this doesn't just mean unprotected vaginal or anal sex. Some STIs can be passed on through oral sex (kissing, licking or sucking someone's genitals) or through close genital to genital contact.

There are lots of STIs out there that you've probably heard of, like Chlamydia, gonorrhoea, genital warts, herpes simplex. HIV too is also classified as a sexually transmitted infection because one of the modes of infection is through sexual activity.

Some STIs don't show up straight after you get infected. Some may show signs a few days after unprotected sex. Others can go unnoticed for a long period of time, or even show no symptoms at all.

If you leave STIs untreated, they may cause serious damage to your long-term health and/or ability to have children in future.



# Why are sexually transmitted infections important in HIV prevention?

People with an STI are more at risk than others to become infected with HIV. STIs create small (sometimes even invisible) sores on the genitals (the male and female sex organs). These are openings that may allow HIV to be transmitted from one person to another. If you are infected with an STI, or think you are infected, please go to a clinic and have it properly diagnosed and treated. Then notify your sexual partner to be treated also. You must take all the drugs as prescribed by the doctor and begin to use a condom with your partner throughout the period of treatment.

# Does an STI increase the risk of HIV infection?

**YES.** The person who has an STI - such as herpes or syphilis - that results in sores or ulcers is at greater risk of transmitting or contracting HIV. Those at risk of acquiring STIs are also at risk of contracting HIV if they have unprotected sex.

# What are the signs of STIs?

Many STIs have similar symptoms and some STIs don't have any symptoms at all.

Here are some common symptoms to look out for...

## Men:

- Discharge for the penis
- Sore, tender or inflamed penis head or foreskin
- Testicles ache or pain

## Women:

- Unusual vaginal discharge (a change in the amount, texture or colour)
- Bleeding in between periods or heavier than normal periods
- Sore, tender or inflamed vulva
- Lower abdominal pain

## Both Sexes:

- Stinging sensation when you urinate
- Painless, itchy lumps or growths in the genitals or anal area
- Itching, blisters or sores in the genital region (also around the mouth and/or nose)
- Pain during sex
- Anal discharge or itching
- Feverish, like symptoms with any of the above

Keep your eyes open for these signs and be ready to seek medical help – even if you just want a check-up to be sure you're okay

# How can I protect myself from HIV infection?

## Sexual activity:

The main mode of HIV transmission among young people in Nigeria is through sexual activity and you can only rule out infection if you:

- Abstain from sexual intercourse
- Have sex with only one uninfected partner, and both of you only have sex with each other
- Having protected sex using male or female latex condoms which are used correctly and every time you have sex

## Mother to child transmission:

- Be aware of one's HIV status and consider taking antiretroviral drugs during pregnancy and labour
- Reduce the baby's exposure to mother's bodily fluids: consider the best course of delivery (i.e. caesarean section)
- Mothers with HIV are advised not to breastfeed

## Blood transfusions and medical procedures:

- Ensure that all blood and blood products are screened to rule out HIV infection before transfusion
- Ensure a new or sterilized needle is used for each injection and do not share injection equipment (needles, syringes) or sharp piercing instruments

# Can a person become infected with HIV through a single exposure?

Anyone can become infected with HIV from a single unprotected sexual act, by sharing injecting drug needles or through transfusion of infected blood or blood products. People are more infectious just after acquiring HIV.

# How do I know if I have HIV?

The only way to know if you have HIV is to get tested. Early HIV infection does not have any visible symptoms. If you have HIV you can still be healthy for several years. and do your work or everyday tasks.

# What is the HIV test?

The HIV antibody test is the most appropriate test for routine diagnosis of HIV. When a person is infected with HIV, the body responds by producing special proteins that fight infections, called antibodies. An HIV antibody test looks for these antibodies in blood, saliva and urine. If antibodies to HIV are detected, it means a person has been infected with HIV.

# What is the “Window Period”?

The “Window Period” is a term used to describe the period of time between HIV infection and the production of the antibodies. During this time an antibody test may give a false negative result, which means the test will be negative even though the person is infected with HIV.



# What are the benefits of having a blood test for HIV?

If the test shows that you are HIV negative, you can:

- Learn how to protect yourself from HIV infection
- Feel relieved

If your test shows that you are HIV positive you can:

- Learn about HIV and how to take good care of yourself
- Plan carefully for the future of yourself and your family
- Share your problem and discuss solutions with other people with HIV
- Take extra care of your health to protect against other infections
- Take precautions to prevent re-infection with other strains of HIV
- Take precautions to prevent yourself from infecting other people
- You can be referred to other experts or support group for further information and management.

# Who is at risk of HIV infection?

Everyone is at risk of HIV. However, there are particular behaviours and practices that increase your risk of HIV infection, such as:

- Having multiple sexual partners whose HIV status is unknown
- Engaging in unprotected sexual intercourse
- Sharing skin-piecing or drug injection equipment

You alone can decide to take precaution to protect yourself. To enable you to appropriately modify your behaviour, you need to assess your level of risk to HIV infection.

# How do I assess my risk to HIV?

Put (X) or tick (✓) in the following boxes as appropriate

- ☐ Have I had more than one sexual partner without using a condom?
- ☐ Have I had a sexual partner who has or has had other sexual partners?
- ☐ Have I had sexual intercourse with anyone who has tested positive for HIV without using a condom?
- ☐ Have I had sex with anyone without using a condom whose past sexual behaviour I don't know?
- ☐ Have I had one or more sexually transmitted infections (discharge sores or itching on my genitals)?
- ☐ I did not go to the clinic for the proper treatment of the STI.
- ☐ Have I ever been so drunk that I did not remember having sex?
- ☐ Have I ever forced someone to have sex against his/her will?

## How do I assess my risk to HIV?

- [ ] Have I or any of my sexual partners had blood transfusion?
- [ ] Have I had injections or received incisions from traditional healers untrained health personnel or local injectors?
- [ ] Have I shared any skin piecing instruments with others?
- [ ] Do I handle body fluids, including blood without using universal precautions (hand gloves for example)?

Note: if you have ticked (✓) to any of these questions, then you are at risk of being infected with HIV. The more the ticks, the greater your risk. Do not panic! But do go for counseling at the nearest HIV Counseling and Testing (HCT) centre or health facility that provides HCT service.

# Why are young women at a higher risk of HIV infection than young men?

Many young women lack information about sexual and reproductive health and disease prevention. In Nigeria, many young women ages 15 to 24 do not have access to information or resources about reproductive health and HIV/AIDS or access to health care. In addition, young women are most vulnerable because their genital tracts have less mature tissue, which may be more easily torn, and they are often victims of coercive or forced sex.

# Is there a cure for AIDS?

No, there is no known cure for HIV/AIDS. There are medical treatments that can slow down the rate at which HIV weakens the immune system. There are other treatments that can prevent or cure some of the illnesses associated with AIDS. Researchers are testing a variety of preventive and curative vaccine candidates, but a successful vaccine has not been found till date.

Therefore, until a cure of vaccine is found, our best option is to adopt preventive measures to protect ourselves and our partners from getting infected.

# What is the ABC...DE approach to HIV prevention?

**A**

**Abstain:** Choose not to have sex.

**B**

**Be Faithful:** Have sex with only one partner who has had a negative HIV test

**C**

**Condomize:** Use a condom correctly every time you have sex.

**D**

**Do get tested:** Know your own HIV status.

**E**

**Educate yourself:** Access the information that is available on HIV.

# What should anyone living with HIV know?

For anyone living with HIV/AIDS you require information, counselling, care and support. In general too, you should:

- Protect yourself from sexually transmitted infections
- Avoid passing the infection to others through unprotected sexual intercourse
- Share information about your HIV status with those you trust
- Eat nourishing food and get adequate rest
- Seek counseling about pregnancy, for the sake of the mother and child.



# How can the community help people living with HIV and AIDS?

- Avoid stigmatizing and discriminating against them
- Provide them with support and care
- Respect their rights
- Ensure that they fully participate in decisions and activities that affect their lives.

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