

How do you get HIV?

YOU CAN GET HIV VIA... **AVERT.org**

			
SEX WITHOUT A CONDOM	PASSED FROM MOTHER TO BABY	SHARING INJECTING EQUIPMENT	CONTAMINATED BLOOD TRANSFUSIONS & ORGAN TRANSPLANTS

FAST FACTS

- You can only get HIV through certain bodily fluids of an infected person (e.g. blood, semen, breast milk).
- HIV can be transmitted during unprotected sex; through sharing injecting equipment; from mother-to-baby during pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding; and through contaminated blood transfusions.
- HIV cannot survive outside the body. It cannot be spread through the air, from touching, toilet seats or shared cutlery.
- Using condoms during sex, or taking PrEP consistently will protect you from HIV infection through sex.
- Taking HIV treatment if you are a new or expectant mother, and avoiding shared injecting equipment if you use drugs, will also protect you and those around you from HIV.

Despite what you may have heard, there are only a few ways you can get HIV. Here, we explain the ways you can get it and how to protect yourself from HIV infection.

How can you get HIV?

HIV lives in the following bodily fluids of an infected person:

- blood
- semen and pre-seminal fluid (“pre-cum”)
- rectal fluids/anal mucous
- vaginal fluids
- breast milk.

To get infected, these bodily fluids need to get into your blood through a mucous membrane (for

example the lining of the vagina, rectum, the opening of the penis, or the mouth), breaks in the skin (like cuts), or be injected directly into your bloodstream.

Other bodily fluids, like saliva, sweat or urine, don't contain enough of the virus to transmit it to another person.

A person living with HIV can pass the virus to others whether they have [symptoms](#) or not. People with HIV are most infectious in the first few weeks after infection. People living with HIV who have an '[undetectable](#)' viral load cannot pass on HIV through sex.

The main ways you can get HIV are:

Sex without a condom

- having [unprotected sex](#) (meaning sex without a [condom](#), if you are not taking [PrEP](#)) with someone who has HIV, particularly unprotected [vaginal sex](#) and [anal sex](#).

Sharing injecting equipment

- sharing needles, syringes or other equipment used to prepare and [inject drugs](#) with someone who has HIV.

Passed from mother-to-baby during pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding

- a mother infected with HIV can pass the virus to her baby via her blood during [pregnancy and birth](#), and through her breast milk when breastfeeding.

Contaminated blood transfusions and organ/tissue transplants

- receiving [blood transfusions](#), [blood products](#), or [organ/tissue transplants](#) that are contaminated with HIV. This risk is extremely small because most countries test blood products for HIV first.

If adequate safety practices are not in place, [healthcare workers](#) can also be at risk of HIV from cuts made by a needle or sharp object (needlestick injury) with infected blood on it. However, the risk of 'occupational exposure', is very low in most countries.

If you think you have put yourself at risk of HIV, the only way to find out if you have HIV is to have an [HIV test](#).

How can't you get HIV?

There are many myths about HIV. Some people wrongly believe that HIV can be spread through the air (even though HIV can't survive outside the body). HIV can't be spread by touching toilet seats or from mosquito bites either.

See our page on [HIV myths](#) for more information.

How do I protect myself from HIV?

There are a number of ways you can protect yourself from HIV, including:

- using a condom every time you have [vaginal](#), [anal](#) or [oral sex](#)
- in some countries [PrEP](#) is available. This is a course of HIV drugs which if taken consistently as

- advised by your healthcare professional prevents HIV infection through sex
- avoiding sharing needles, syringes and other injecting equipment with anyone if you take drugs
 - taking [HIV treatment](#) if you are a new or expectant mother living with HIV, as this can dramatically reduce the risk of passing HIV to your baby during pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding
 - asking your healthcare professional if the blood product you are receiving (blood transfusion, organ or tissue transplant) has been tested for HIV
 - taking precautions if you are a healthcare worker, such as wearing protection (like gloves and goggles), washing hands after contact with blood and other bodily fluids, and safely disposing of sharp equipment.

For more detailed information on how to prevent HIV infection visit the relevant page from the listed below:

[Unprotected sex and HIV](#)

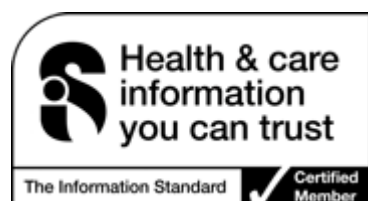
[Sharing needles to inject drugs and HIV](#)

[Pregnancy, childbirth & breastfeeding and HIV](#)

[Working in healthcare and HIV](#)

[Blood transfusions & organ/tissue transplants and HIV](#)

Photo credit: Copyright AVERT



Sources:

[AIDS.gov 'How Is HIV Transmitted?'](#) (accessed December 2017)

[NHS choices 'HIV and AIDS - Causes'](#) (accessed December 2017)

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) 'PrEP'](#) (accessed December 2017)

Next full review: 20 December 2020

Last full review: 20 December 2017

Last updated: 19 April 2018