

Myths about HIV and AIDS



FAST FACTS:

- There are lots of myths around, but the facts of how you can get HIV are very simple.
- By knowing the facts about how HIV is actually transmitted, you can save yourself a lot of worry and help to bust myths among others too.
- One of the most common myths people living with HIV hear is that they can be cured. There's no cure yet for HIV, but antiretroviral treatment works and will keep someone living with HIV healthy.

There are lots of myths and misconceptions about how you can get [HIV](#). Here we debunk those myths and give you the facts about [how HIV is passed on...](#)

HIV can only be passed on from person to person if infected body fluids (such as blood, semen, vaginal or anal secretions and breast milk) get into your bloodstream in these ways:

- [unprotected sex](#)
- [from mother to child during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding](#)
- [injecting drugs with a needle that has infected blood in it](#)
- [infected blood donations or organ transplants](#) .

You cannot get HIV from...

Someone who doesn't have HIV

You can only get HIV from someone who is already infected with HIV.

Touching someone who has HIV

HIV can't survive outside of the body so you won't get HIV from touching someone, hugging them or shaking their hand.

Sweat, tears, urine or faeces of someone who has HIV

There is no HIV in an infected person's sweat, tears, urine or faeces.¹

Mutual masturbation

Mutual masturbation, fingering and hand-jobs are all safe from HIV. However, if you use sex toys make sure you use a new [condom](#) on them when switching between partners.

Insects

You cannot get HIV from insects. When an insect (such as a mosquito) bites you it sucks your blood - it does not inject the blood of the last person it bit.

Animals

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus, which means that the infection can only be passed on between humans.

Air

HIV cannot survive in the air so coughing, sneezing or spitting cannot transmit HIV.

New or sterilised needles

New needles cannot transmit HIV because they haven't been in the body of an infected person. If used needles are cleaned and sterilised properly they can't transmit HIV either.

Water

HIV can't survive in water, so you won't get HIV from swimming pools, baths, shower areas, washing clothes or from drinking water.

Food and cooking utensils

HIV can't be passed on through food or cooking utensils even if the person preparing your food is living with HIV.

Toilet seats, tables, door handles, cutlery, sharing towels

HIV doesn't survive on surfaces, so you can't get HIV from any of these.

Musical instruments

HIV can't survive on musical instruments. Even if it is an instrument that you play using your mouth, it can't give you HIV.

Used condoms

HIV can only survive for a really short amount of time outside of the body. Even if the condom had sperm from an HIV-positive person in it, the HIV would be dead.

Kissing

There is such a small amount of HIV in the saliva of a person living with HIV that the infection can't be passed on from kissing.

Oral sex

The risk of HIV from oral sex is very small unless you or your partner have large open sores on the genital area or bleeding gums/sores in your mouth.

There is only a slightly increased risk if a woman being given oral sex is HIV positive and is menstruating. However, you can always use a dental dam to eliminate these risks.

Tattoos and piercings

There is only a risk if the needle used by the professional has been used in the body of an HIV-infected person and not sterilised afterwards. However, most practitioners are required to use new needles for each new client.

YOU CAN'T PREVENT OR CURE HIV BY... **AVERT.org**

 WASHING AFTER SEX	 SEX WITH A VIRGIN	 PULLING OUT METHOD	 SPELLS AND HERBAL MEDICINE
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USING THE CONTRACEPTIVE PILL

Condoms and PrEP used correctly and consistently **protect** you from **HIV** transmission during sex.

I've heard that you can prevent HIV with [insert here]

There are lots of urban rumours about ways that you can protect yourself from HIV - from showering after sex or taking the contraceptive pill to having sex with a virgin. In reality, if you are having sex the only methods of HIV prevention which will protect you from HIV are [condoms](#) or [pre-exposure prophylaxis \(PrEP\)](#).

Can herbal medicine cure HIV?

Some people choose to take alternative forms of medicine, such as herbal remedies, as a natural way of treating HIV. However, herbal remedies do not work.

What's more, taking herbal medicines can be dangerous as they will not protect your immune system from infection and may interact poorly with ARVs if you are taking them alongside treatment. The only way you can stay healthy when living with HIV is to take [antiretroviral treatment](#) as prescribed by your doctor or healthcare worker, and to attend viral load monitoring appointments to make sure they are working for you.

If I get infected fluid from an HIV-positive person into my body will I definitely get HIV?

No, HIV is not always passed on from an infected person. There are lots of reasons why this is the case. For example, if the HIV-positive person is on [treatment](#) it will reduce the amount of HIV in their body meaning it is [unlikely to be passed on](#).

If you're concerned that you've taken an HIV risk you may be eligible to take [post-exposure prophylaxis \(PEP\)](#), which stops the virus from becoming an infection. However it's not available everywhere and has to be taken within 72 hours to be effective.

Isn't HIV only a risk for certain groups of people?

Like most illnesses, HIV doesn't discriminate between types of people and the infection can be passed on to anyone via one of the ways mentioned above.

Some people are more vulnerable to HIV infection if they engage regularly in certain activities (e.g. [injecting drugs](#)) that are more likely to transmit the virus.

However, it's a common misunderstanding that HIV only affects certain groups.

While not everyone has the same level of HIV risk, everyone can reduce their risk of infection.

I'm HIV-positive and so is my partner so we don't have to worry about HIV do we?

There are many strains of the HIV virus. If you and your partner are [living with HIV](#) you still need to protect each other from additional HIV infections. If you get infected with two or more strains of HIV it can cause problems for your [treatment](#).

If you are on effective treatment and a medical professional has confirmed your viral load is undetectable, you will not pass HIV on through sex.

It's really important to always take a [HIV test](#) if you think you have been at risk of HIV.

It's easy to tell the symptoms of HIV...

The [symptoms](#) of HIV can differ from person-to-person and some people may not get any symptoms at all. Without treatment, the virus will get worse over time and damage your immune system. There are [three stages of HIV infection](#) with different possible effects.

You also cannot tell by looking at someone if they have HIV. Many people don't show signs of any symptoms. And, for people living with HIV who are on effective treatment, they are just as likely to be as healthy as everyone else.



- [1. San Francisco AIDS Foundation, 'How is HIV/AIDS transmitted?' \[accessed online 23/04/2015\]](#)

Sources:

[NHS Choices \(2014\) 'HIV and AIDS - Causes'](#)

[CDC \(2015\) 'HIV Transmission'](#)

[WHO \(2015\) 'Guidelines on post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV...'](#)

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