Conceiving safely

People living with HIV can conceive safely and have HIV-negative children. However, it's important to take precautions when trying to conceive, so you and your partner can stay healthy. This is true whether:

1. You’re in a mixed status relationship – where one partner is negative and the other is positive

2. Or you’re both living with HIV – as unprotected sex risks transmitting different strains of the virus, which can make treating your HIV more difficult

If you don’t know your status, get tested before trying for a baby, so you can conceive safely.

Having an HIV-free baby

- Remember, HIV can be passed from mother to child during pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding.
- So if you’re a woman living with HIV, you will need to take precautions during this time as well.

Why should I plan my pregnancy?

Planning your pregnancy means you can:

- both get tested for any STIs
- make sure your viral load is low if you’re living with HIV to reduce infection risk (see next page for more information)
- start taking PrEP if you’re HIV-negative (see next page for more information)
- time sex for during ovulation – maximising your chance of conception and minimising your risk of HIV transmission
- start taking folic acid, a vitamin taken by women to promote their baby’s health.

Speak to your healthcare worker before trying for a baby. They can help you plan your pregnancy to protect your baby and your partner.

Need more information?
See our ‘HIV testing’ factsheet.
How can I conceive safely?

**HIV treatment (if you’re HIV-positive)**
- Antiretroviral treatment can reduce the amount of HIV in your body, making transmission during sex less likely.
- If you wish to minimise the risk of transmission further, only have sex without a condom during ovulation.
- If your viral load is undetectable, your risk of transmission during sex is zero. This makes it safe to try for a baby at any time.

**PrEP (if you’re HIV-negative)**
- PrEP is a pill taken by the HIV-negative partner, to prevent HIV infection.
- If you are taking PrEP properly there is virtually no risk of getting HIV.
- This makes it safe to try for a baby through unprotected sex.
- PrEP isn’t available everywhere. Ask your healthcare professional if it is available for you.

**In vitro-fertilisation (IVF)**
- In IVF the egg and sperm are combined outside of the body and then implanted directly into the uterus.
- IVF eliminates any risk of transmission.
- Access to IVF can be limited, so speak to a healthcare worker to find out if it’s an option for you.

**Artificial insemination**
- Artificial insemination protects the male partner from HIV infection.
- Instead of having unprotected sex, the man’s sperm is inserted into the woman’s vagina using a syringe.
- It is possible to do this at home, but speak to a medical professional first to get advice.
- Remember, artificial insemination works best during ovulation.

**Spermwashing**
- Spermwashing protects the female partner from HIV infection.
- Semen is the fluid that comes out of a man’s penis when he ejaculates. It contains sperm and seminal fluid.
- Spermwashing separates sperm from the surrounding seminal fluid. Unlike seminal fluid, sperm does not contain HIV.
- Access to sperm washing can be limited in some settings. Ask your healthcare professional for more information.

**Know your rights**
- You have the right to choose if, when and how you conceive.
- You have the right to refuse abortion or sterilisation.
- You have the right to treatment, even if you refused it before.