

# Do you know how HIV is passed on?

Find out how HIV is transmitted, how the virus survives in the body and how to protect yourself from the risk of infection

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[www.avert.org/fact-sheet-sources](http://www.avert.org/fact-sheet-sources)



## There are four main routes of HIV transmission:



unprotected vaginal or anal sex  
(oral sex carries a very small risk)



sharing unsterilised injecting drug  
equipment



from mother-to-baby in pregnancy,  
childbirth or breastfeeding



infected blood used for transfusions,  
transplants or medical procedures,  
although this risk is extremely small  
because most countries test blood  
products for HIV first.

## Who's at risk?

Anyone can become infected with HIV – it's not exclusive to particular groups or lifestyles.

If fluids from an HIV-positive person enter your body then you are at risk.

**U = U**

If a person living with HIV is on antiretroviral treatment and they have an undetectable viral load, they can no longer transmit HIV through sex to someone else.

## How does HIV survive?

HIV is a virus. It can't live outside the body for very long. It enters the body directly via the bloodstream or mucous membranes such as the:



**vagina** – via the lining of the vagina, cervix or womb



**penis** – via the urethra or inside of the foreskin



**anus** – via the lining which is very delicate.

HIV enters and attacks the cells of the body's immune system – the system that normally kills off viruses. Once HIV has infected someone, it's found in their:



semen (cum) or pre-seminal fluid  
(pre-cum)



vaginal fluid



rectal fluids / anal mucous



breastmilk



blood (including menstrual blood).

# HIV transmission facts

HIV can be transmitted by:



## Vaginal sex

HIV can be transmitted from woman to man or vice versa. Open cuts and sores increase the risk.



## Anal sex

Higher risk than vaginal sex because the very delicate lining of the anus is more likely to tear, creating an entry point for HIV.



## Oral sex

Only a risk if there are sores in/ around the mouth or on the receiving partner's genitals.



## Injecting drugs

Shared, unsterilised equipment can carry infected blood. Needles used for tattooing and body piercing can also carry a small risk.



## Blood transfusions and transplants

All donated blood should be tested for HIV; any untested blood carries a risk of HIV transmission to the patient receiving the blood transfusion.



## Mother-to-child

Transmission can occur during pregnancy, labour, delivery or breastfeeding if HIV treatment is not taken correctly.

## How do I protect myself from HIV?



Use a condom every time you have vaginal, anal or oral sex.



Take PrEP where available – this is a course of HIV drugs which if taken consistently as advised by your healthcare professional prevents HIV infection through sex.



Avoid sharing needles, syringes and other injecting equipment with anyone if you take drugs.



Take HIV treatment if you're 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.



Ask your healthcare professional if the blood product you are receiving (blood transfusion, organ or tissue transplant) has been tested for HIV.



Take precautions if you're 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.

Need more information?  
Visit [avert.org/hiv-transmission-prevention](https://www.avert.org/hiv-transmission-prevention)

## Transmission myths

HIV cannot be transmitted by:



Bathing



Toilet seats



Hugging



Kissing



Sharing food