



AIDS and HIV

AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome), caused by infection with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), remains one of the most devastating pandemics in modern history. Since HIV was first identified more than 15 years ago, it has spread rapidly to every corner of the globe. In Illinois, more than 26,200 cases of AIDS were reported to the Illinois Department of Public Health between January 1981 and December 2001. Nearly every county in the state has reported at least one case of HIV or AIDS.

What is AIDS?

AIDS is a disease that causes the body to lose its natural protection against infection. A person with AIDS is more likely to become ill from infections and unusual types of pneumonia and cancer that healthy persons normally can fight off. It is caused by the human immunodeficiency virus. The virus, which is found in the blood and other body fluids of infected individuals, attacks certain white blood cells that protect the body against illness. Currently, there is no vaccine or cure for AIDS.

How does someone get HIV?

HIV is not easy to get. Both men and women can become infected and can give the virus to someone else. HIV is found in the blood, semen and vaginal secretions of infected persons and can be spread in the following ways:

- Having sex – vaginal, anal or oral – with an HIV-infected person (male or female)
- Sharing drug needles or injection equipment with an HIV-infected person to inject or "shoot" drugs
- Passing the virus from an HIV-infected woman to her baby during pregnancy or during birth (An infected mother also can pass HIV to her baby through breastfeeding.)

HIV cannot be spread in the following ways:

- Shaking hands, hugging or simple kissing
- Coughs or sneezes, sweat or tears
- Mosquitoes, toilet seats or donating blood
- Eating food prepared or handled by an infected person
- Everyday contact with HIV-infected persons at school, work, home or anywhere else

The most common modes of exposure to HIV are –

- sex between men who have sex with men
- injection drug use
- heterosexual contact, primarily with injection drug users

Because HIV-infected persons may look and feel healthy, many are unaware they are infected and capable of infecting others. Only an HIV antibody test can determine exposure to the virus. Too often, people at greatest risk of HIV infection do not know their high-risk behaviors can result in HIV infection, or they are reluctant or unable to change those high-risk behaviors.

How is HIV diagnosed?

An HIV antibody test, either from a blood sample or an oral sample, can tell whether your body has been infected with the virus. If it has, your immune system makes proteins called antibodies. It takes most persons up to 12 weeks after exposure to develop detectable antibodies ("window period"), but some may take as long as six months. If your test is positive for HIV antibodies, it means you are infected and can infect others. If the test is negative, it generally means you are not infected. But, because the "window period" may be as long as six months, you should be tested again if, in the six months prior to the test, you engaged in behavior that could transmit the virus.

Where is the test available?

Anonymous or confidential counseling and testing services are available at many local health departments and community agencies, including through some outreach testing sites. A trained counselor will help you understand the test, your results and how to protect your health whether you are infected or not. For help locating a convenient test site, call the toll-free AIDS/HIV and STD Hotline at 1-800-243-2437. You also can arrange to be tested by your personal physician.

How can infection with HIV be prevented?

To avoid infection through sex, the only sure way is not to have anal, vaginal or oral sexual intercourse or to have sex only with someone who is not infected and who has sex only with you. Using latex condoms correctly every time you have vaginal, anal or oral sex can greatly lower your risk of infection. Don't impair your judgment with drugs. Never share needles or injection equipment to inject drugs or steroids. HIV in blood from an infected person can remain in a needle, syringe or other item, then be injected directly into the bloodstream of the next user.

Is HIV disease treatable?

People who are infected with HIV can do many things to live healthier and longer lives. First, they must take care of themselves: eat right, get plenty of exercise and sleep and avoid being exposed to airborne and foodborne pathogens. There are also medications that slow the growth of the virus and delay or prevent certain life-threatening conditions. The Illinois Department of Public Health provides FDA-approved prescription drugs through its AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) for HIV-infected patients who meet specific income guidelines. Since managing the personal, financial and medical aspects of this disease can be daunting for many faced with the challenge, HIV-infected persons generally are offered case management services through 10 HIV care consortia. Case managers coordinate an effective system of care based on each client's individual needs. The ADAP Hotline is 1-800-825-3518.

Is confidential information available?

Yes. To ask questions about personal risk or to learn more about HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases, call the free and anonymous AIDS/HIV and STD Hotline at 1-800-243-2437 or TTY (hearing impaired use only) 1-800-782-0423.

For more information:

Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) www.idph.state.il.us

HIV/STD Hotline 1-800-243-2437 (TTY 1-800-782-0423)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) www.cdc.gov/std/

CDC National STD Hotline

(800) 227 - 8922 (English) (24 hours, 7 days a week)

(800) 344 -7432 (Spanish) (8 am - 2 am EST) (7 days a week)

(800) 243 - 7889 (TTY for hearing impaired) (Monday-Friday 10 am - 10 pm EST)

CDC National AIDS Hotline

(800) 342 - AIDS (2437) (English) (24 hours, 7 days a week)

(800) 344 - SIDA (7432) (Spanish) (8 am - 2 am EST)

(800) 243 - 7889 (TTY for hearing impaired) (Monday-Friday 10 am - 10 pm EST)

American Social Health Association www.ashastd.org

SOURCE: Illinois Department of Public Health, 535 West Jefferson Street, Springfield, IL 62761
217-782-4977 TTY 800-547-0466 Website: www.idph.state.il.us



Communicable Disease Reporting and Resource Manual for Schools and Child Care Centers
Website: www.kanehealth.com 630-208-3801

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