

10 BASIC FACTS ON HIV AND AIDS

1 AIDS is caused by HIV.

AIDS is caused by HIV, the human immunodeficiency virus, which damages the body's defense system. People who have AIDS become weaker because their bodies lose the ability to fight all illnesses. They eventually die. There is no cure for HIV.

2 The onset of AIDS can take up to ten years.

The onset of AIDS can take up to ten years from the time of infection with the HIV virus. Therefore a person infected with HIV may look and feel healthy for many years, but he or she can still transmit the virus to someone else.

New medicines can help a person stay healthier for longer periods of time, but the person will still have HIV and be able to transmit HIV.

3 HIV is transmitted through HIV-infected bodily fluids.

HIV is transmitted through the exchange of any HIV-infected bodily fluids. Transfer may occur during all stages of the infection / disease.

HIV is found in the following fluids: blood, semen (and pre-ejaculated fluid), vaginal secretions, breast milk.

4 HIV is most frequently transmitted sexually.

HIV is most frequently transmitted sexually. That is because fluids mix and the virus can be exchanged, especially where there are tears in vaginal or anal tissue, wounds or other sexually-transmitted infections (STIs).

Girls are especially vulnerable to HIV infection because their vaginal membranes are thinner and more susceptible to infection than those of mature women.

5 People who have Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) are at greater risk of being infected with HIV.

People who have STIs are at greater risk of being infected with HIV and of transmitting their infection to others. People with STIs should seek prompt treatment and avoid sexual intercourse or practice safer sex (non-penetrative sex or sex using a condom), and inform their partners.

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6 The risk of sexual transmission of HIV can be reduced.

The risk of sexual transmission of HIV can be reduced if people do not have sex, if uninfected partners have sex only with each other or if people have safer sex -- sex without penetration or using a condom. The only way to be completely sure to prevent the sexual transmission of HIV is by abstaining from all sexual contact.

7 People who inject themselves with drugs are at high risk of becoming infected with HIV.

HIV can also be transmitted when the skin is cut or pierced using an unsterilised needle, syringe, razorblade, knife or any other tool. People who inject themselves with drugs or have sex with drug users are at high risk of becoming infected with HIV. Moreover, drug use alters people's judgment and can lead to risky sexual behaviour, such as not using condoms.

8 Contact a health worker or an HIV and AIDS centre to receive counselling and testing.

Anyone who suspects that he or she might have been infected with HIV should contact a Government hospital or an AIDS-related NGO to receive advice as well as confidential counselling and testing. It is your right. (*Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child*).

9 HIV is not transmitted by everyday contact.

HIV is not transmitted by: hugging, shaking hands; casual, everyday contact; using swimming pools, toilet seats; sharing bed linens, eating utensils, food; mosquito and other insect bites; coughing, sneezing.

10 Everyone deserves compassion and support.

Discriminating against people who are infected with HIV or anyone thought to be at risk of infection violates individual human rights and endangers public health. Everyone infected with and affected by HIV and AIDS deserves compassion and support. (*Article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child*).