

## How is HIV treated?

There is no curative treatment for HIV, but antiretroviral drugs help stop HIV from damaging the immune system – allowing one to live a longer and healthier life. Social and emotional support, also through counselling, psychotherapy are very important to help persons live with HIV and make the best out of their life.

## How can you prevent HIV?

There is currently no vaccine for HIV. However, there are ways to **prevent HIV** infection. Effective HIV prevention interventions include:

- ◆ Abstain from sex
- ◆ Be faithful
- ◆ Use condoms consistently and correctly: store properly check 'use by' date and CE mark; use a condom every time; make sure size and shape of condom is right for you.
- ◆ Avoid sharing of needles: needle exchange programmes can help to prevent HIV transmission among drug users by providing clean needles and disposing of used ones.
- ◆ Do an HIV test & seek early health care: get early treatment to prevent further damage to the immune system.
- ◆ If you are an HIV positive mother: take antiretroviral drugs during pregnancy and avoid breastfeeding to prevent transmission of virus to the child.

## Where can you get help?

- ◆ Consult your family doctor (GP)
- ◆ **GU (Genitourinary) Clinic**  
For an appointment call **21 227 981. Confidentiality is guaranteed**
- ◆ Contact the **Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate** on **2326 6000**
- ◆ Referral to **Infectious Disease Unit** by your doctor.

“ *Sexual health is more than freedom from sexual disease... Sexual health is non-exploitive and respectful of self and others... is dependent upon an individual's well-being and sense of self-esteem. Sexual health requires trust, honesty, and communication.* ”

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This leaflet provides information about HIV, its mode of transmission and ways to prevent it.

HBV - HCV - HIV

## What is HIV?

HIV stands for **Human Immunodeficiency Virus**. HIV is a virus. It attacks the immune system, reducing protection against serious illnesses. The virus eventually causes AIDS – **Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome**. The progress from HIV to AIDS takes about 10 years, depending on one's lifestyle, health and treatment provided.

## How is HIV transmitted?

HIV is found in the blood and sexual fluids of an infected person, and in the breast milk of an infected woman. HIV transmission occurs when a sufficient quantity of these fluids gets into an uninfected person's bloodstream.

### Ways you can become infected with HIV:

- ◆ Unprotected sexual intercourse with an infected person: Sexual activities without a condom carry the risk of HIV infection. (Condom use still carries some risk but it reduces it substantially)
- ◆ Contact with an infected person's blood: If sufficient infected blood enters one's body, HIV is likely to be transmitted.
- ◆ Use of infected blood products: such as injecting drugs with needles that were used by an infected person.
- ◆ From mother to child: during pregnancy, delivery and breastfeeding.

Other body fluids, like saliva, sweat or urine, do not contain enough of the virus to infect another person.

Therefore, you **CANNOT** get HIV through:

- ◆ Kissing, hugging, touching, shaking hands
- ◆ Sharing food, crockery, and utensils
- ◆ Swimming pools and toilet seats
- ◆ Insect or animal bites

HIV can infect anybody - women, men, children, and people of all sexual orientations!

## What are the signs and symptoms of HIV?

Initially, someone living with HIV **may show no symptoms**. It is important to remember that a person who has HIV can pass on the virus immediately after becoming infected, even if they feel healthy.

**It is NOT possible to tell just by looking if someone has HIV.**

### Common symptoms of HIV infection include:

- ◆ weight loss
- ◆ diarrhoea
- ◆ skin rashes, especially on your face, genitals or anus
- ◆ increase in herpes ulcers or thrush infections in your mouth and genitals
- ◆ night sweats
- ◆ tiredness
- ◆ nausea or loss of appetite
- ◆ swollen lymph glands in the neck, groin or armpits
- ◆ flu-like illness.

Although, the above may be symptoms of HIV, they can all be caused by other less serious illnesses and do not necessarily mean that you have HIV/AIDS.

The only way to know if you are infected with HIV is to get tested, especially if you think you may have been at risk of HIV infection. Although discovering that you are HIV positive may be shocking, it is the first step to getting support treatment and staying healthy.

