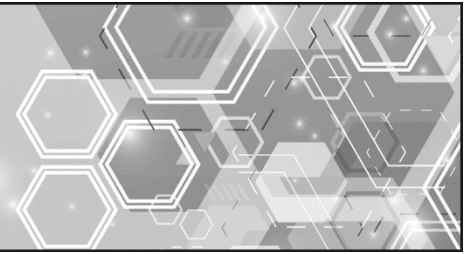




# Durham Region Health Department Facts about...



## HIV/AIDS

### What is it?

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a virus that attacks the immune system. Without treatment, HIV infection can lead to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), which is the latest stage of disease. Though there isn't a cure, HIV is a manageable chronic condition with proper treatment and support.

**HIV/AIDS is a reportable infection and must be reported to the Health Department.**

### How is it spread?

HIV is found in the blood, semen, rectal fluid, vaginal fluid and breastmilk of an HIV infected person.

HIV is spread by unprotected (vaginal, oral or anal) sex or by sharing needles or other drug equipment with someone who has HIV.

A person infected with HIV can pass the virus on to their baby during pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding.

U=U (Undetectable = Untransmittable) means that if someone with HIV is being treated and has had blood tests showing they don't have detectable virus, they cannot spread HIV in any way.

You cannot get HIV from saliva, tears, coughing or sneezing, sharing the same drinking fountain, from a swimming pool, toilet seat, by shaking hands, hugging, eating food that has been prepared by someone infected with the virus, or from an insect bite.

### What do I look for?

HIV symptoms usually start in two to four weeks after becoming infected. Symptoms may include fever, swollen lymph nodes, headache, fatigue, sore throat, night sweats, rash, or joint aches, mouth sores, vomiting and diarrhea. Symptoms may be mild.

Symptoms of chronic untreated HIV infection can include enlarged lymph nodes, weight loss, vision loss, yeast infections in the mouth and throat, severe herpes or skin lesions, dry cough and shortness of breath. For women, recurrent vaginal yeast infections and abnormal pap tests can occur.

Once AIDS has developed, symptoms can include severe infections, cancers, dementia and death.

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# How do you test for it?

Testing for HIV is done by a blood test or a finger prick. If a finger prick test is positive, it needs to be confirmed by a blood test.

When someone is newly infected with HIV, it can take up to 6 weeks to show up on a blood test. The finger prick test can take up to 12 weeks to show the virus. This is known as the window period.

HIV is a reportable infection which means positive lab results are provided to public health. Some testing sites offer the option of anonymous or non-nominal testing, where results are not tied to your name.

# How is it treated?

HIV is treated with medications that reduce the amount of HIV in your body. Having less HIV in your body gives your immune system a better chance to fight off infections and cancers. Some people will need to take medication to boost their immune system as well. There is no cure for HIV, but with treatment many people living with HIV can have a long, healthy life and prevent spread to their partners.

# How can I protect myself?

- Practice safe sex and always use a condom with lubricant when having oral, vaginal, or anal sex.
- Do not share any drug equipment and use a new needle each time. New, clean needles and injection equipment are available through the John Howard Society of Durham Region - Project X-change program.
- If you are pregnant or plan to become pregnant, talk to your health care provider. A pregnant person with HIV can take medications to limit the chance of passing HIV onto their baby.
- If you are having unprotected sex with people who are HIV positive or at risk of HIV, a healthcare provider can prescribe a medication to help prevent transmission - pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).
- If you are exposed to blood, seek medical attention immediately. Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is available to help prevent transmission if taken within 72 hours of exposure.
- You can test for HIV at your doctor's office, sexual health clinics or anonymous HIV-testing sites.

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