

HIV/AIDS

Fact Sheet

What is HIV/AIDS?

HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. HIV is a virus that weakens the body's defence system (the immune system). The immune system helps you fight off germs and stay healthy. HIV is passed from one person to another through certain body fluids, like blood, semen, vaginal fluids, and breast milk.

People with HIV can live long, healthy lives.

There is no vaccine or cure for HIV but the right medication can lower the virus in your body so much that tests cannot find it, making it "undetectable." If your HIV is undetectable, it means you cannot pass the virus to your sexual partner/s. This is called Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U).

How does HIV spread?

HIV can spread when:

- you have anal or vaginal sex without using a condom or dental dam.
- you share needles, syringes, or other equipment for injecting drugs.
- a person with HIV (and a detectable viral load) passes it to the baby during pregnancy, birth, or breastfeeding.
- someone is injured by a used needle (this can happen to healthcare workers).

HIV cannot spread from:

- Kissing
- Sharing cups, plates, or cutlery
- Hugging or shaking hands
- Toilet seats
- Mosquito bites

What are the symptoms?

About 7 in 10 people who get HIV will have symptoms. These usually start about 2 weeks after getting the virus. This early stage is called **seroconversion illness**.

Early symptoms can include:

- Fever (feeling hot)
- Rash on the skin
- Swollen glands (lumps in the neck, armpits, or groin)
- Sore throat
- Feeling very tired
- Aching muscles or joints
- Diarrhoea (runny poo)

After the **seroconversion illness**, most people with HIV will have no symptoms for many years even though the virus is still in the body.

If HIV is not treated, it can badly damage the immune system. This late stage of HIV is called **AIDS** (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). AIDS makes it easier to get sick with diseases like tuberculosis, infections and some cancers.

Who should be tested for HIV?

Anyone can ask for an HIV test. However, some people have a higher chance of getting HIV. This includes:

- Gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men
- Trans men, and trans or gender diverse people who have sex with men
- People who inject drugs and share needles or other injecting equipment
- People who have recently had another sexually transmitted infection (STI)
- People who have travelled to places where HIV is common (like parts of Africa, South Sudan, Mauritius, the Americas, Eastern Europe, or Thailand) and had sex without a condom with someone whose HIV status they don't know
- People from countries where HIV is common (including refugees, asylum seekers, or people coming to Australia in refugee-like situations)
- People who have had tattoos or piercings overseas using unclean/unsterilised equipment.

How can I protect myself from HIV

You can lower your chance of getting HIV by:

- Using condoms and water-based lubricant when having anal or vaginal sex.
- Never sharing needles, syringes, or other equipment if you inject drugs.

- Only getting tattoos or piercings when you know the tools are clean and sterile
- Asking your doctor about **PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis)**. PrEP is a pill that can stop you getting HIV.
- Asking your doctor about **PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis)** if you think you may have been exposed to HIV recently. PEP is a medicine that:
 - can stop you from getting HIV
 - you take as soon as possible after potential exposure to HIV
 - needs to be started within 3 days (72 hours) of the exposure
 - you take every day for 4 weeks.

How can I get tested for HIV?

If you think you have been exposed to HIV, it is important to get tested. There are three types of HIV tests:

- **Blood test:** sent to a lab with results in a few days.
- **Rapid antibody test:** a finger prick with results in 20 minutes or less.
- **Self-test:** a finger prick test that you can do at home or anywhere you feel comfortable. It works like the rapid test and gives results in 20 minutes or less.

HIV will not show up on tests immediately after infection, because of the 'window period.' The 'window period' is the time it takes for the virus to show up in tests and can be 2 - 12 weeks.

While waiting for test results, it is very important to keep using condoms and not share needles to stay safe. Keep using safer sex practices even after you get your results.

If you get a positive result from a rapid or self-test, it's important to get a blood test to confirm it.

How is HIV treated?

There is no vaccine or cure for HIV but there is very good treatment called **antiretroviral therapy (ART)**. ART helps stop HIV from harming your immune system. If you take ART every day, the virus can become so low that it cannot be found in your blood. This is called an undetectable viral load (UVL).

When the virus is undetectable, you cannot pass HIV to your sexual partner/s (U=U).

People with HIV who take ART as prescribed can live long, healthy lives.

There are different kinds of ART medicines. Your doctor will help you find the best one for you.

What should I do if I test positive for HIV?

If your test shows you have HIV:

- Make an appointment with your doctor or a sexual health clinic. They will explain what happens next. You might need more tests before starting treatment.
- Consider talking to a counsellor or a peer worker. It's normal to feel many emotions when you find out you have HIV.
- Think about telling any sexual partners who might be at risk. Your doctor or nurse can help you tell them - either you can do it, or they can contact them without saying who you are.
- If you are pregnant, talk to your doctor about starting HIV treatment (ART) to protect your baby during pregnancy, birth, and breastfeeding.

Where can I get tested?

You can visit SHINE SA for further information, testing and treatment. Peer-led Rapid HIV testing is available at SHINE SA Hyde Street - call 7099 5300 to book.

You can also connect with the following services:

- your local doctor, health care provider or Aboriginal Health service
- **Adelaide Sexual Health Centre:** drop in or phone
275 North Terrace, Adelaide
Tel: 7117 2800
- **SAMESH**
SAMESH provides services for people at risk of contracting HIV and people living with HIV
57 Hyde Street, Adelaide
Tel: 7099 5300 W: <http://samesh.org.au/>
- **PEP Hotline**
Open 24/7
Tel: 1800 022 226



© SHINE SA. Last updated October 2025

SHINE SA Fact Sheets are regularly reviewed and updated. To download the most recent version visit www.shinesa.org.au

SHINE SA Appointments and Enquiries

Tel 8300 5300 **Online Bookings** www.shinesa.org.au

Clinic locations and times are available at www.shinesa.org.au

Sexual Healthline

Tel 1300 883 793 **Country callers (toll free)** 1800 188 171

Talk to a sexual health nurse about any sexual health issue.

Available 9am – 12.30pm, Monday – Friday

National Relay Service

www.relayservice.gov.au

133 677 (TTY/Voice) 1300 555 727 (Speak & Listen) 0423 677 767 (SMS Relay)