

HIV/AIDS

What Young People Want to Know

Population Reports compiled these questions asked by young people from a variety of published sources. The answers can help inform young people about AIDS and encourage healthy behavior.

What is HIV/AIDS?

HIV—the human immunodeficiency virus—infects and weakens people, making them very ill and unable to fight off other infections. AIDS—acquired immunodeficiency syndrome—develops between 2 to 10 years after infection with HIV, as the final stage. A person with AIDS eventually dies from diseases caused by the infections associated with HIV.

How do you become infected with HIV?

You can become infected if the blood, semen, or vaginal fluid of someone who has HIV enters your body. The main things that people do that put them at risk of getting HIV are:

- | Having sex with a person who has HIV without using a condom correctly every time you have sex.
- | Using needles for intravenous drug use that are contaminated with HIV.
- | Body piercing or tattooing or being cut with needles, razors, or other sharp objects that have not been sterilized and are contaminated with HIV.

In addition, children can be infected in the womb, during childbirth, or during breastfeeding if their mothers have HIV.

Can I become infected with HIV if I have oral or anal sex, but not vaginal sex?

Yes.

Can I get HIV by having sex with an infected person even though that person got HIV another way than through sex?

Yes. People with HIV can pass it to others through any behavior that transmits HIV, no matter how they got HIV themselves.

Can I get HIV through casual contact with infected people?

No. It is not possible to be infected by going to the same school, using the same toilet, drinking from the same glass, or doing anything that does not involve blood, semen, or vaginal fluids from an infected person entering your body. Kissing an infected person cannot transmit HIV unless the infected person's saliva or blood mixes with your blood, as through open cuts or sores.

Can I get HIV from the bite of a mosquito or other type of insect?

No.

Can you tell by looking at someone if they have HIV/AIDS?

No. Often, a person with HIV/AIDS looks no different from other people. People living with HIV/AIDS can develop health problems, but so can others who do not have HIV/AIDS.

Is there a vaccine that can protect me from HIV?

No. Research is underway but so far has not developed a vaccine against HIV.

If I have been treated for other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), am I immune to HIV?

No. Having an STI increases your chances of getting HIV from your sex partner and of transmitting it to other partners. If you get treated for and are cured of your STI, your chances of getting HIV decrease but are not eliminated.

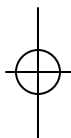
Is there any 100% effective way to protect myself from HIV/AIDS?

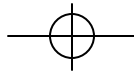
Yes. You can avoid HIV infection if you:

- | Abstain from sex entirely, or you and your partner have sex only with each other and are certain that neither of you is infected with HIV. (The only way to be sure that you and your partner are free of HIV is to get tested for HIV together and to see the results together.) AND
- | Do not share needles for intravenous drug use. AND
- | Do not have body piercing or tattooing or get cut with needles, razors, or other sharp objects that others may have used and have not been sterilized since.

If I have HIV and have sex with somebody who is not infected, will that help cure me?

No, and you might infect the other person with HIV.





HIV/AIDS:

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(Continued)

Is there any cure for HIV/AIDS?

No. Once you are infected, HIV will be in your body for the rest of your life.

Do condoms protect against HIV infection?

Yes. Using either male or female condoms correctly in every sexual act, including the first time you have sex, protects against HIV infection. Another benefit of condoms is that they also prevent pregnancy. Using condoms *every time* is very important. So is using condoms correctly, so that they do not break or slip off during sex. Many people do not use condoms consistently or correctly and thus risk HIV infection.

Isn't it true that HIV is so small that it can pass through the condom?

No. The condom is an effective barrier to HIV when used correctly.

If a sex partner wants to use a condom, does that mean the person has HIV or thinks the other person does?

No. Many people use condoms because it is a safer way to have sex. In fact, the condom is the only contraceptive method that provides dual protection—that is, it protects both against HIV infection and against pregnancy. Some people prefer to use a condom to avoid risk of HIV along with another contraceptive method for added protection against pregnancy.

What happens if I have HIV/AIDS and have unprotected sex or inject drugs with another person who has HIV/AIDS?

The two of you will still have HIV/AIDS. Your health may worsen, in fact, because each of you is giving the other more of the virus. This is called re-infection.

How can I be sure that I do not have HIV?

You can be tested for HIV. An HIV test detects antibodies to HIV, which the body produces when virus or bacteria infect it. It usually takes three to six months after exposure to HIV for a test to detect these antibodies. Several kinds of HIV tests are available at health clinics and other facilities. The most common tests require a sample of blood, urine, or inner cheek cells. You may have to wait several days or weeks for your test result, although newer tests can give the results within minutes. An HIV test should also include a counseling session with a health professional before and afterwards to help you understand the test and its results and to answer your questions.

When should I have an HIV test?

It is important to be tested if you currently engage in or have

ever engaged in behavior that might expose you to HIV infection, such as having sex without a condom or injecting drugs.

Some specific occasions for having an HIV test include:

- | You are about to begin a sexual relationship with someone, and you both want to be sure that there is no risk for HIV infection.
- | You and your partner plan to have a baby and want to be sure that the baby will not face risk of HIV infection from the mother during pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding.
- | You want to confirm your own HIV status because a sex partner or someone you shared needles with is seriously ill or has just died, and you suspect AIDS.

What are the possible results of an HIV test?

A test result can be HIV-negative, HIV-positive, or indeterminate. If you test HIV-negative, it probably means that you are not infected, but it could mean instead that you took the test too soon after exposure to HIV for the antibodies to have developed. If you test HIV-positive, it is almost certain that you are infected. The chances that an HIV-positive result is wrong are very low. An indeterminate test result means that it is not clear whether you have HIV or not. Then you have to take the test again. Also, whether you test HIV-negative or HIV-positive, you sometimes might be asked to take the test again to be sure of the result.

How often should I get tested?

How often you should get tested depends on your situation, so you should consult a health care provider for the specific answer. If you are engaging in behavior that could cause infection, it is important to be tested about every six months because you could get infected at any time.

Is there a difference between an anonymous test and a confidential test?

Yes. In anonymous testing, the test site does not ask for any personal information—such as your name, address, or telephone number—so no one but you has access to your personal HIV test results. In confidential testing, your personal information is linked to the test result, but it is kept private and not revealed to others.

Do I have to tell anybody what my HIV/AIDS status is?

Whether you tell anybody your HIV/AIDS status and whom you tell are decisions that only you can make. A counselor may be able to help you make the decision.

How can I best tell someone that I have HIV/AIDS?

Telling close friends and family members that you have HIV/AIDS takes courage. Before you tell anyone, you need to feel emotionally stable about your HIV status. You may want to consult an HIV counselor, peer educator, health care worker, or clergyman and ask for suggestions or advice. When you tell people, be prepared to deal with a range of reactions, from fear and anger to compassion and understanding.

