everything you need to know about AIDS and HIV
What are HIV and AIDS!

HIV and AIDS are two related but different medical conditions.

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus, meaning:
- It only affects humans – it cannot be transmitted through animals;
- It creates a deficiency in our immune system and makes people with HIV more prone to colds, other infections and viruses;
- It is a virus – a tiny organism that needs to get into someone's blood to reproduce and thrive.

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, meaning:
- It is not hereditary;
- It is indicated by deficiency or failure of the immune system.

A person does not actually die from AIDS but from a severe infection (e.g. pneumonia) which their immune system is too weak to fight off. The term AIDS is now rarely used except as part of statistics reporting.

How can people contract HIV?

HIV is a blood-borne virus. It is not contagious. It can only be transmitted through 3 main routes:
- From unprotected sexual intercourse (vaginal and anal) and oral sex with an infected partner;
- By sharing infected drug injecting equipment; and
- From an HIV-positive mother to her child during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding.

Because HIV has no specific symptoms, a person with HIV can pass it on to someone else without knowing it.

**HIV CANNOT** be transmitted through casual contact (e.g. shaking hands, working together); from sneezing, kissing, coughing or hugging; from food handling, sharing a plate or cutlery; from sharing a bathroom, toilets or showers.
How to prevent HIV transmission?

There is no vaccine against HIV but there are ways of reducing or eliminating the risk of HIV transmission.

Sexual transmission
Male or female condoms used correctly and consistently protect against HIV transmission through sexual intercourse. Condoms must be used every time people have sex, including oral sex, and a condom must not be used twice.

Injecting drugs
The risk of contracting HIV when injecting drugs can be significantly reduced by using clean needles and never sharing drug equipment.

Mother-to-child
Specific drugs given to an HIV-positive woman during pregnancy, labour and delivery can significantly reduce the chances of the baby becoming infected with HIV. Delivery by caesarian and giving the newborn anti-HIV drugs also lowers the risk of transmission. Formula feeding instead of breastfeeding reduces the baby’s exposure to its mother’s body fluids.
What is HIV Post-Exposure Treatment?

Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) is a course of medication that can stop people becoming HIV-positive after they have been exposed to the virus. **PEP is NOT a method of prevention** but an emergency treatment that is only prescribed for sexual exposure under strict guidelines. PEP does NOT work every time and is not a substitute for condoms.

To be most effective, PEP must be started immediately after unsafe sex or condom breaking, and no later than 3 days (72 hours) after exposure. Go to www.pep.chapsonline.org.uk for more information.

Can HIV be treated?

There is no cure for HIV, but it is treatable. HIV antiretroviral treatments consist of 3 or more drugs that must be taken every day at regular intervals for the rest of a person’s life. Stopping HIV treatment, even for one day, can have detrimental consequences as the virus may become resistant and more difficult to fight.

HIV treatments can have minor but also life threatening side-effects. Common side-effects include blood problems, fatigue, diarrhoea, and nausea.

Someone with HIV can live well and in good health for many years.

Taking an HIV Test

The only way to find out whether a person has HIV is by having a blood test which will reveal if they have antibodies to the virus in their blood. If they do, it means they have HIV and are said to be HIV-positive.

It can take up to 3 months after exposure to HIV before HIV antibodies show up in the blood. This means that a test done during this period is not reliable as HIV antibodies may not be detectable despite the person actually being infected. If the test occurs after those 3 months and is negative (i.e. there are no HIV antibodies in the blood) the person is not infected with HIV. Any HIV positive test result must be confirmed with a second test.
UK Statistics

- There are an estimated 65,000 people living with HIV in the UK, and HIV is the country's fastest growing serious health condition.
- 27% of people living with HIV are unaware of their infection.
- The number of people living with HIV has increased by 16% in the last 2 years.
- On average, a person is infected with HIV every 6 hours in the UK.
- Heterosexual contact is now the most common route of infection. Men who have sex with men are the group second most affected by HIV.
- People aged 16-24 years of age account for 14% of all new HIV diagnoses.

Worldwide Statistics

- 42 million people are now living with HIV.
- 25 million people have died of AIDS globally.
- More than half of all new HIV infections around the world occur among those under the age of 25. The majority of these young people are between the ages of 15-24.
- 10 young people become infected with HIV per minute.
- Girls and young women represent 62% of young people, aged 15-24, estimated to be living with HIV around the world.
- 5 people die of AIDS each minute.
- 7,200 people die of AIDS every day.
- Sub-Saharan Africa is the worst affected region in the world with an estimated 25.8 million people living with HIV and AIDS.
The Red Ribbon

The Red Ribbon has been the international symbol of AIDS awareness since 1991. By wearing it people show their support to those living with, and affected by HIV and AIDS. It is a symbol of unity and solidarity that can be worn not only on World AIDS Day (1st December), but on every other day too.

YOU can Make a Difference TODAY

There are many ways you can get involved in the fight against HIV:

- **Contribute** to HIV awareness-raising activities by giving out Red Ribbons and other resources. Check out [www.globalAIDSRainbow.org](http://www.globalAIDSRainbow.org) for ideas!


- **Get campaigning** at [www.worldaidscampaign.org](http://www.worldaidscampaign.org)

More Information

- **Facts about HIV**: [www.avert.org](http://www.avert.org)

- **Find out about your nearest GUM clinic**: [www.condomessentialwear.co.uk](http://www.condomessentialwear.co.uk)

- **Get support and advice**: call the free Sexual Health Information Line on 0800 567 123 (7 days a week, 24 hours a day. Calls from mobiles may be charged).

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