

## What can we do about AIDS?

First, it is vitally important that we educate ourselves and our families about HIV disease. Because a substantial number of HIV positive people DO NOT KNOW that they are infected, we should consider getting tested for HIV at the time of other ordinary health encounters.

As the epidemic continues, not only will more people become infected, they will face the discrimination, stigma and prejudice that too often accompany the disease. Understanding HIV disease can help us respond with intelligence and compassion. Preventing AIDS is a challenge we cannot ignore.

Our lives and our health, spiritual and physical, are God's gifts to us. These gifts hold each of us personally responsible for our health and the health of others. By understanding the disease better, we can help to decrease the stigma, we can pray, we can volunteer to help our neighbors, we can participate in HIV/AIDS activities in our own communities.



## Where can I get help?

For more information, call the

**ILLINOIS AIDS HOTLINE**  
**1-800-243-AIDS**

**AIDS FOUNDATION OF CHICAGO (AFC)**  
(312) 922-2322

*For anonymous, free HIV testing, call:*

**CHICAGO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**  
(312) 747-8900

**COOK COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**  
North Suburbs: (847) 818-2861  
South Suburbs: (708) 232-4500  
West Suburbs: (708) 786-4000  
Southwest Suburbs: (708) 974-6160

**LAKE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**  
(847) 377-8450

For more information contact:

**Catholic Charities HIV/AIDS Liaison  
to the Archdiocese of Chicago**

651 West Lake Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60661  
(312) 948-6500

[www.catholiccharities.net](http://www.catholiccharities.net)

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CATHOLIC CHARITIES  
OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

# HIV/AIDS



*What you know  
could save your life*



# What you know could save your life...

## What is AIDS?

AIDS, or acquired immune deficiency syndrome, is caused by a virus that attacks the body's immune system. This virus is called HIV, the human immunodeficiency virus. Infection with HIV is easily identified with a blood or saliva test that indicate the presence of HIV antibodies in the body. Infection with HIV results in the body slowly losing its ability to fight off infections or diseases. HIV disease is the term that describes the entire course of the condition, beginning with HIV infection and progressing to AIDS, the final phase of the disease. Five to 10 years after becoming infected, a person can develop one or more infections or malignant tumors, all of which are considered to be AIDS-related conditions and can be life threatening if not treated. Treatment of HIV with medication is readily available and effective. It is why persons with HIV infection, who adhere to a treatment program, can live a normal life span. Confidential and/or anonymous testing is readily available.

## How do people get infected with HIV?

When first infected with HIV, the person generally does not feel sick, looks healthy and does not know that they are infected. Even so, that person can infect others. An HIV-infected person can pass the virus to others through semen, blood or vaginal secretions, without either person knowing it. People can become infected through sexual intercourse with an HIV-infected person. The virus can be passed between a man and a woman, from a man to a man, and from a woman to a woman, during vaginal, anal or oral sex. Injecting drugs and sharing a needle also cause HIV infection. The HIV-infected person's blood may remain in the needle or syringe and be injected in to the blood stream of the person sharing the equipment including needles used in tattooing and body piercing. Before 1985 blood transfusions

and blood products could spread the virus. Today, however, all donated blood is tested for HIV, so there is little chance of becoming infected this way. Pregnant women who are HIV-infected may pass the virus to their children during pregnancy or birth. However, not all children of HIV-infected mothers develop HIV disease. The chance that the child will develop AIDS can be greatly reduce by treatment of HIV-infected pregnant women. A baby also can get HIV from an infected mother through breastfeeding.

## How HIV is NOT spread.

The virus is not spread by casual contact or by the bite of an insect, nor does it travel though the air like some other viruses. Hugging, shaking hands or simply being near a person who is infected carries no risk. It is completely safe to live in the same house, work in the same office, go to school with an HIV-infected person, or use the same restrooms, water coolers, telephones or pools. Transmission between HIV positive persons and uninfected sexual partners is greatly reduced if the positive person's HIV infection is controlled with therapy. None of these activities will contribute to the spread of HIV.

## What are the symptoms of HIV infection?

While some people will have no symptoms and feel healthy, other people infected with the virus can be expected to develop one or more of the following symptoms:

- **Being tired much of the time**
- **Unexplained weight loss**
- **Swollen glands**
- **Chronic yeast infections in the mouth or vagina**
- **Dry cough or shortness of breath**
- **Spots on the skin or in the mouth**
- **Fever, chills or night sweats**
- **Diarrhea**

## How is HIV infection prevented?

The only medically sure way to prevent infection is to abstain from sexual intercourse, or if married, remain faithful to your partner; and to avoid illegal, injectable drugs. Women who are considering pregnancy are encouraged to be tested for HIV before getting pregnant. These guidelines reflect the teaching of Christ on the use of the gift of sexuality and the sanctity of life.

Precautions popularly called "safer sex" can be misleading. These safer sex practices reduce the likelihood of the transmission of the virus, however The National Academy of Sciences states that not a single recommended precaution is absolutely safe. Abstinence is the only 100 percent sure way to prevent the infection.

When speaking of preventing infection, public health authorities acknowledge that HIV infection is best prevented by eliminating risky behaviors like unprotected sex and the use of injectable drugs, but they also encourage the use of latex condoms to help prevent HIV infections and other sexually transmitted diseases. For people who continue to share injectable equipment, cleaning needles and syringes with bleach and water will help reduce the risk of infection. But public health authorities also warn that these precautions are not foolproof and do not guarantee the absolute protection a person should seek.

The Catholic Church is very clear about the best ways to prevent the spread of HIV: sexual abstinence, fidelity to one's marriage partner and avoiding illegal, injectable drugs.

