

## Fact Sheet

# HIV



HIV is a disease that damages a person's immune system. The immune system is the part of the body that fights off illness and helps keep a person healthy. HIV makes a person's immune system very weak which can cause the person to get very sick. HIV stands for 'human immunodeficiency virus'.

## How do people get HIV?

HIV is passed from one person to another person through their body fluids. A person must already have HIV to pass it on to another person.

Some examples of body fluids are blood, semen (cum) and fluids from a woman's vagina.

The body fluids that carry HIV can get into another person's body through broken skin, the vagina, anus and penis.

### *There are different ways a person can get HIV*

A person cannot get HIV from hugging, kissing, shaking hands, using toilets, or drinking from the same glass as a person with HIV.

Some ways a person can get HIV are:

- If a person has vaginal sex without a condom with someone who has HIV
- If a person has anal sex without a condom with someone who has HIV
- If a person uses the same needle as a person with HIV to inject drugs
- If a person uses the same needle as a person with HIV to get a tattoo

- If a woman has HIV when she gives birth, the baby can get HIV. A baby can be prevented from getting HIV if their mother takes medication while she is pregnant
- If a woman has HIV when she breastfeeds, the baby can get HIV.

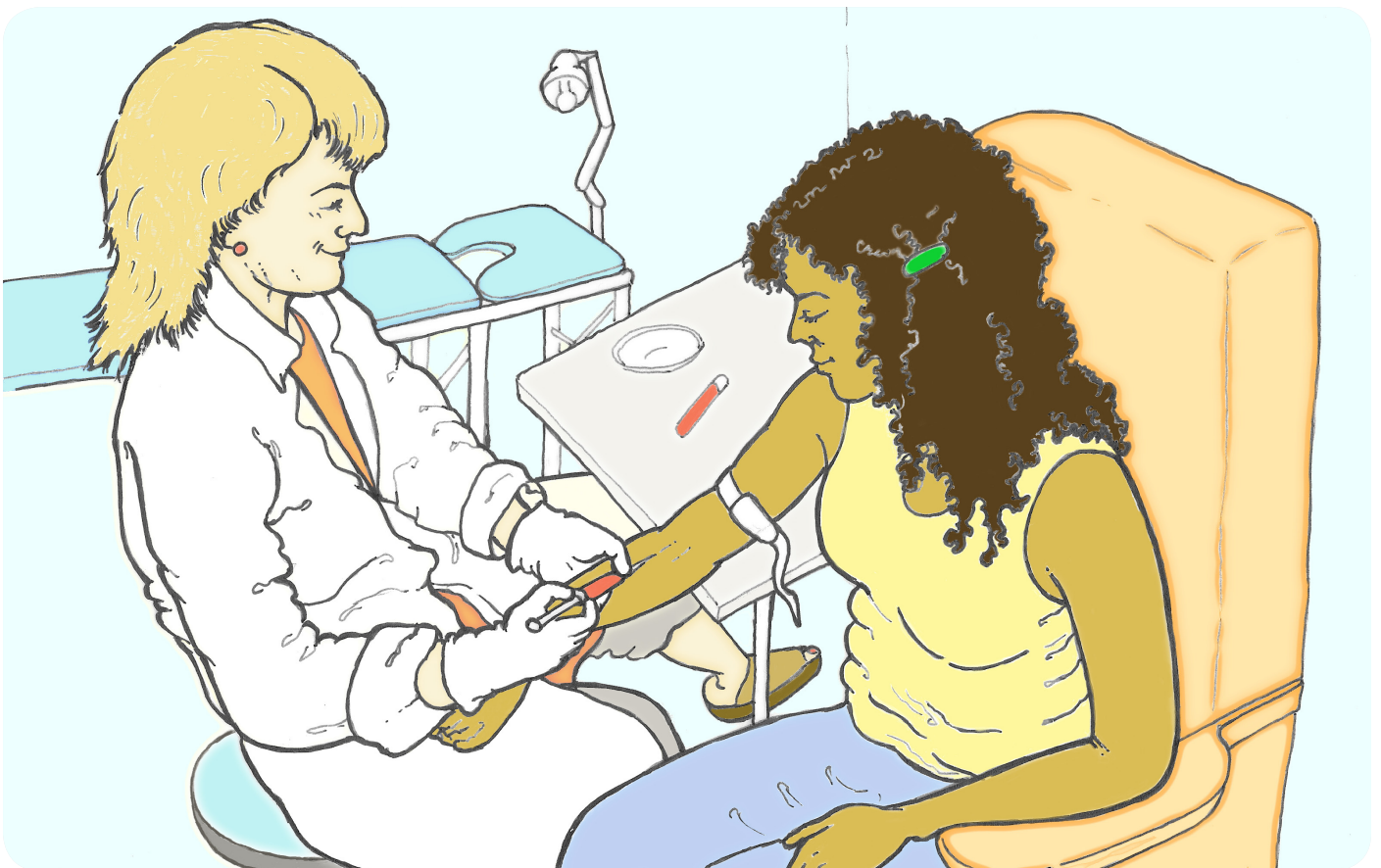
For information on different types of sex go to the fact sheet called 'Having sex'.

## Testing for HIV

Most people with HIV look and feel well for years. Many people may not know they have HIV. The only way for a person to know if they have HIV is by taking a blood test.

If a person has sex without condom and is worried about getting HIV, it is important they get tested. If a person has ever shared a needle to inject drugs, it is important they get tested for HIV.

If a person wants to get tested for HIV they can go to their doctor, a Family Planning clinic or sexual health clinic.



*In this picture a woman is getting a blood test done by a doctor.*

## HIV treatment

There is no cure for HIV but there are tablets that can help people with HIV to stay healthy. The tablets keep the amount of HIV in a person's body at a low level. This can stop the damage it does to a person's immune system. These tablets are called 'anti-retroviral medication'.

If a person has HIV, it is best to start taking the tablets as soon as possible. The person will need to take the tablets every day for the rest of their life to stay healthy. A person can talk to their doctor about starting anti-retroviral medication.

## Safe sex

When people use a condom to have sex it is called 'safe sex'.



*In this picture there are two naked men on a bed. One man is putting on a condom before they have sex.*

Safe sex can help stop a person getting HIV or other STIs. Condoms stop semen (cum), blood and fluids from the vagina from being shared between partners when having sex. This reduces the chance of HIV being spread from one person to another.

It is important to use water based lubricant (lube) when having anal sex to stop the condom from breaking. Lubricant can also make anal sex more pleasurable. A person can buy condoms and water based lubricant from a chemist, supermarket, Family Planning clinic or sexual health clinic.

For more information on STIs go to the factsheet called 'Safe sex and sexually transmissible infections'.

### *Do not share needles when injecting drugs*

When people share a needle to inject drugs they are putting themselves at risk of getting HIV. If a person injects drugs they should use a new needle every time. A person can go to a Needle and Syringe Program to get free needles. For more information about injecting drugs safely go to the fact sheet called 'Where to go for help and advice'.

### *Where to go for help*

A person may become worried they have HIV because:

- They had sex without a condom
- The condom broke during sex
- They shared a needle to inject drugs
- They were sexually assaulted

If a person is worried they have HIV, they should get help straight away. There is medication they can take that can help stop HIV spreading through a person's body.

This medication should be taken as soon as possible. The person should take this medication for one month.

The medication is called PEP. A person can get this medication from hospitals, sexual health clinics or some doctors. For more information a person can call the PEP Hotline on 1800 737 669. It is important that the person call the PEP Hotline as soon as possible.

# Living with HIV

## Staying healthy

A person who has HIV can live a happy and healthy life. There are things a person can do to make sure they stay healthy. These include:

- Taking HIV medication everyday
- Eating a healthy diet
- Getting regular exercise
- Asking for support from family and friends.



*In this picture a man and woman are cycling through a park together. They are happy and healthy and enjoying life.*

## Getting support

If a person has HIV it can be hard for them to talk to other people about it. Some people might not know much about HIV. Some people might be afraid that they will get HIV too.

There are things a person can do to get support for living with HIV.

- Speak to someone they trust
- Meet other people with HIV to talk about their experiences. There are support groups that can be very helpful
- Talk to a counsellor
- Get help from a HIV support service

For more information on HIV support services in NSW go to the factsheet 'Where to go for help and advice'.



*In this picture a woman is calling a HIV support service to get help and advice about HIV.*



## What you need to know

- HIV makes a person's immune system very weak and can make them get very sick.
- HIV can be passed from one person to another through some body fluids.
- You can get HIV by having sex without a condom with someone that has HIV.
- You can get HIV by sharing needles to inject drugs.
- If you think you might have HIV you can talk to a doctor about getting a blood test.
- There is no cure for HIV but there are tablets that can help people with HIV to stay healthy.
- Using condoms can help stop a person from getting HIV or other STIs.
- You can get help or information about HIV from your doctor or a HIV support service.