What is HIV/AIDS?

HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus and is the virus that can lead to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).\(^1\) Unlike other viruses, a person’s body cannot get rid of HIV completely, even with treatment.\(^1\) HIV attacks the body’s immune system, such as CD4 cells (T cells), leaving the body susceptible to other infections.\(^1\) At the end of 2015, approximately 1.1 million people were living with HIV in the United States.\(^2\) In 2015, an estimated 39,720 people were diagnosed with HIV in the United States.\(^2\) In 2017, the number of persons diagnosed with HIV/AIDS in Indiana was 547.\(^3\)

Transmission

HIV is most commonly transmitted through sexual behaviors and needle or syringe use. Only blood, semen, pre-seminal fluid, rectal fluids, vaginal fluids and breast milk can transmit HIV.\(^5\)

Main ways HIV is spread:
- Anal or vaginal sex\(^5\)
- Sharing needles or syringes, rinse water or other injection equipment\(^5\)

Less common ways HIV is spread:
- From mother to baby during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding\(^5\)
- Being stuck with an HIV-contaminated needle\(^5\)

HIV is NOT transmitted by:
- Air or water\(^3\)
- Saliva, sweat, tears or closed-mouth kissing\(^5\)
- Insects or pets\(^5\)
- Sharing toilets, food or drink\(^5\)

Transmission by category

HIV is categorized into four modes of transmission: male-to-male sexual contact (MSM), heterosexual contact, persons who inject drugs (PWID) and MSM+PWID.\(^4\) In 2017, the majority of newly diagnosed HIV cases were from MSM, with a high proportion being African American men (43.8%).\(^4\) Young people, aged 13 – 24 years, are especially affected by HIV,\(^4\) with all gay and bisexual men accounting for 47.9% of all new HIV cases in 2017.

HIV/AIDS and co-infection

If you have an STD, you are more likely to get or transmit HIV to others.\(^5\)
- If you are HIV-negative but have an STD, you are three times as likely to get HIV if you have unprotected sex with someone who has HIV.\(^5\)
- If you are HIV-positive and have an STD, you are three times as likely to spread HIV through sexual contact.\(^5\)
- Indiana has a lower number of 2016 co-infections than the national average, with 9.3% of those with HIV being co-infected with HCV (n=1,137). However during the Scott County Outbreak, 231 individuals had tested positive for HIV, and of those 215 (93.1%) were co-infected with HCV.
For additional information on HIV/AIDS in Indiana, please visit: http://www.in.gov/isdh/17397.htm

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HIV/AIDS

Testing

In the United States, approximately 156,300 people are living with HIV and don’t know they are infected with the virus. Each year, about 45,000 people are diagnosed with HIV, and 30% of those new HIV infections are transmitted by people who didn’t know they were HIV-positive.

Recommended testing:
- The CDC recommends testing everyone between the ages of 13 and 64 years old for HIV at least once a year as part of their routine health care.
- Sexually active gay and bisexual men may benefit from more frequent HIV tests, every 3 to 6 months.

HIV tests for screening and diagnosis:
HIV tests are very accurate, but no test can detect the virus immediately after infection. It can take anywhere from 7 days to 12 weeks for a test to detect the presence of HIV in a person’s body. This all depends on the type of test being conducted:
- Antibody tests: Take 3 – 7 weeks to detect HIV
- 4th generation tests: Take 2 – 6 weeks to detect HIV
- NATs: Take between 7 to 28 days to detect HIV

Treatment

Once you have HIV, you will have it for life. There is no effective cure for this disease currently; however, medication to help keep HIV controlled is available.

Preferred treatment
Antiretroviral therapy (ART)

Taking ART the right way every day can reduce an HIV-positive person’s chance of transmitting the virus by as much as 96%.

Protect yourself!

There are more ways today than ever before to help prevent HIV infection. In addition to abstinence, you can do several other things to remain HIV-negative.

To stay HIV-negative, you should:
- Limit the number of your sexual partners
- Never share syringes, needles or works
- Use condoms the correct way every time you have sex
- Take advantage of new medications such as PrEP and PEP

To keep from passing HIV to others, you should:
- Take ARTs the right way and every day

Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) is used when people are at very high risk for developing HIV through risk behaviors. PrEP can stop HIV from spreading throughout the body and is highly effective if used as prescribed.

Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) means taking an ART after being potentially exposed to HIV to prevent becoming infected. PEP should be used only in an emergency and must be started within 72 hours after a possible exposure.

Fast facts
- HIV is a virus that a person’s body cannot get rid of, even with treatment.
- HIV can be transmitted only through an HIV-positive person’s blood, semen, pre-seminal fluid, rectal fluids, vaginal fluids or breast milk.
- Young people, aged 13 – 24 years, are especially affected by HIV, with all gay and bisexual men accounting for 47.9% of all new HIV cases in 2017.
- If you have an STD, you are more likely to get or transmit HIV.
- Everyone between the ages of 13 and 64 should be tested at least annually for HIV. Some populations should be tested more often depending on their risk behaviors.

References