

How do you get AIDS? - HIV/AIDS 101, part 4



You don't actually "get" AIDS. You might get infected with the HIV virus. Then later you might develop AIDS from this infection.

You can get infected with HIV from anyone who is infected, even if they don't look sick and even if they haven't tested HIV-positive yet. The blood, vaginal fluid, semen, and breast milk of people infected with HIV can contain enough of the virus in it to infect other people.

For infection to occur, these body fluids must come into contact with a mucous membrane, damaged tissue, or be directly injected into your bloodstream by a needle or syringe. Mucous membranes are found inside the rectum, vagina, penis, and mouth.



In the United States, HIV is spread mainly by:

- Having anal or vaginal sex with someone who has HIV without using a condom or is not taking medicines to prevent or treat HIV.
- Anal sex which is the highest-risk sexual behavior.
- Vaginal sex which is the second highest-risk sexual behavior.
- Sharing needles or syringes, rinse water, or other equipment used to prepare injection drugs with someone who has HIV. Drug equipment is also called "works".



Less commonly, HIV may be spread from mother to child during pregnancy, birth, or breastfeeding. The risk can be high if a mother is living with HIV and not taking ART, or antiretroviral therapy. ART is the medicine used to treat HIV. HIV can also be spread by being stuck with an HIV-contaminated needle or other sharp object in a medical setting. This risk is mainly for health care workers.

In very rare cases, HIV has been spread by:

- Oral sex
- Blood transfusions or organ transplants
- Being bitten by a person with HIV
- Touching between a wound and HIV-infected blood.
- Deep, open-mouth kissing if the person with HIV has sores or bleeding gums

Be sure to get answers to any questions you have about HIV/AIDS. Your public health department, health care provider, and public library can help.



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