

# Preventing HIV Infection



# What is HIV/AIDS?

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) attacks the immune system and weakens your ability to fight infections and disease.

There is no cure for HIV, but there are treatments available that allow most people with the virus to live long and healthy lives.

Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is the final stage of HIV infection, when your body can no longer fight life-threatening infections. With early diagnosis and effective treatment, most people with HIV will not go on to develop AIDS.

## How do you get HIV?/How is HIV spread

HIV is passed from person-to-person in infected blood and body fluids; this includes semen, blood, vaginal and anal fluids and breast milk.

HIV may be spread:

- through anal or vaginal sex without a condom. Unprotected anal sex carries the highest risk. It is also possible for HIV to spread through oral sex and sharing sex toys, although the chances of this happening are very low
- through using a contaminated needle, syringe or other injecting equipment
- from mother-to-baby during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding.

HIV is not passed on by usual contact with people and cannot be transmitted through saliva, sweat or urine.

## How do I know if I have HIV?

If you think you might have been exposed to HIV, seek medical advice as soon as possible.

The only way to find out if you have HIV is to have an HIV test. This involves testing a sample of blood for signs of the virus. HIV tests may need to be repeated one-to-three months after the potential exposure to the virus, but you shouldn't wait that long to seek help.

Testing is available in a number of health settings including general practices, sexual health centres, community-based centres, special units based in major hospitals, and hospices.

Early diagnosis is important as it allows you to:

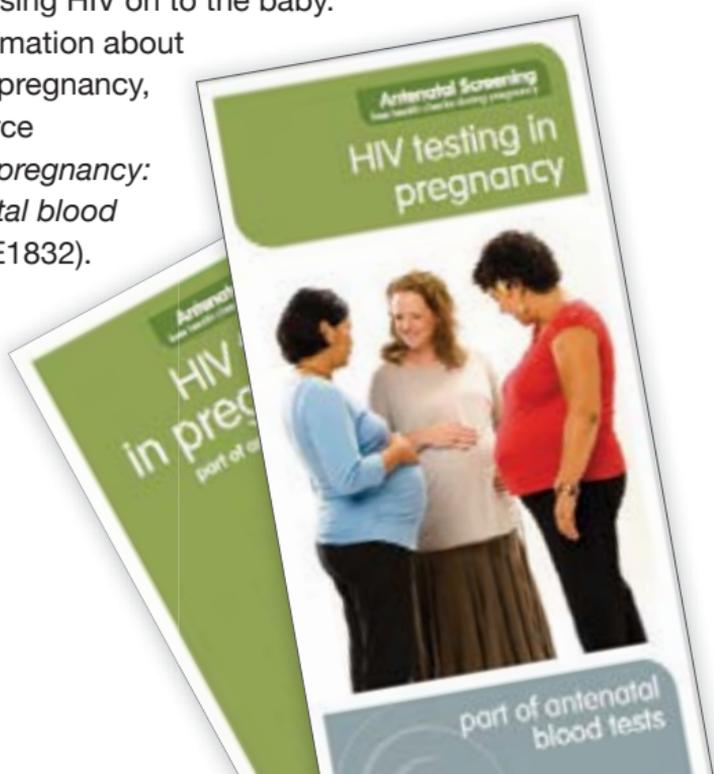
- gain the benefits of earlier treatment and care
- have information and support to adopt and sustain HIV risk-reduction behaviours.

## Women and pregnancy

An HIV test is available to all pregnant women as HIV can be passed from a pregnant woman to her baby during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding. If a pregnant woman is found to be infected with HIV, treatment with antiviral drugs during pregnancy greatly reduces the risk of passing HIV on to the baby.

For more information about HIV testing in pregnancy, see the resource

*HIV testing in pregnancy: part of antenatal blood tests* (code HE1832).



## Preventing HIV infection

### Safer sex practices

The main way that HIV is passed on in New Zealand is through sexual intercourse.

- If you are going to have vaginal or anal sex, you need to use a condom properly every time to keep yourself safe. See the section below for how to use a condom.
- Condoms are very effective in preventing HIV infection and sexually transmissible infections (STIs) when used consistently and correctly.
- You can agree not to have sexual intercourse.
- Talk to your partner about what kind of sex you want. You may choose to abstain from having penetrative sex (ie, penis into vagina or anus). This is a safe way to avoid infection.
- You could set limits for your partner and yourself before agreeing to penetrative sex. Hugging, kissing, touching, massaging and mutual masturbation are intimate but safe ways of showing affection.
- Sex toys such as vibrators can be used safely, but it is best if they are not shared. If they are shared, they must be thoroughly disinfected and covered with a condom to remove any chance of causing infections between users.

### Using a condom

Using a condom every time you have sex reduces your risk of getting an STI. Although using a condom will give some protection, STIs can be passed on to any area not covered by a condom. See the section on the next page for how to use a condom.

You can get condoms on prescription from your doctor, or you can get them free from Sexual Health Services and Family Planning Clinics. You can also buy condoms from pharmacies, supermarkets, pubs, clubs and some dairies.

To help protect against STIs, cover the penis with a condom before it touches the partner's vagina, mouth or anus. **Use a new and lubricated condom each time you have sex.**

- Check the expiry date on the condom packet. If this date has passed, throw the condom away and use one that hasn't expired.
- Open the packet carefully. Fingernails, rings and teeth can tear the condom.
- Before the condom comes into contact with the penis, check that the condom is the right way up (figure 1). Do this by pinching the top of the condom and rolling it down a little. It's the right way up if it rolls down easily (figure 2).
- Continue pinching the top of the condom and roll it onto the hard penis, all the way down to the base (figure 3).
- Apply a water-based lubricant (eg, KY Jelly, Wet Stuff, Sylk or Top Gel) to the condom (figure 4). Oil-based lubricants such as Vaseline can damage condoms.
- After ejaculating (cumming) and when withdrawing, prevent semen from being spilt by holding the condom onto the base of the penis. Remove the used condom from the penis and wrap it in tissue or toilet paper. Put it in the rubbish.

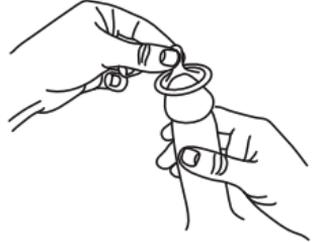


Figure 1

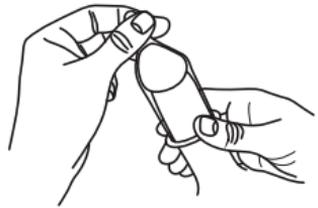


Figure 2



Figure 3

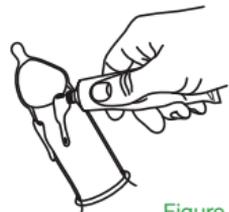


Figure 4

## Safer drug-using activities

HIV (and other bloodborne viruses such as hepatitis B and C) can be passed on through sharing needles, syringes, spoons and other injecting equipment.

If you inject drugs

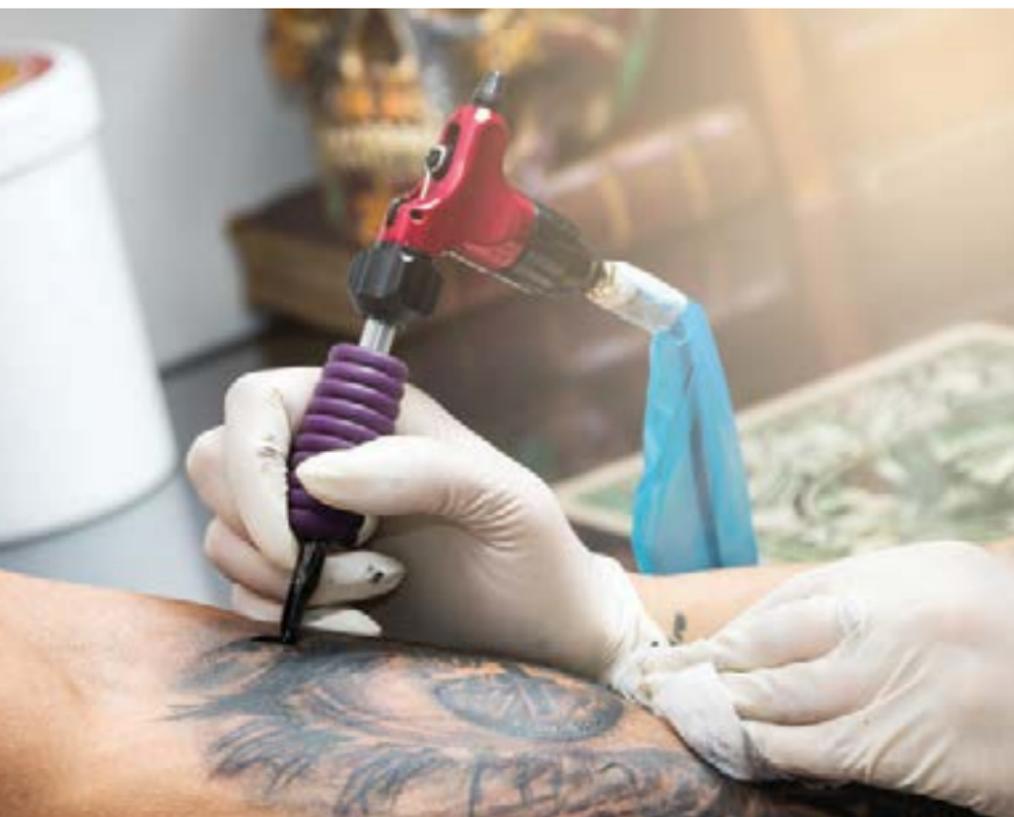
- use new equipment every time you inject
- don't share needles or syringes, or other injecting equipment.

## Travelling overseas

In some parts of the world, blood used in transfusions may not be screened for HIV and other infections. Needles and other surgical or dental equipment may be reused without adequate sterilisations. Ask about this before receiving any treatment.

## Skin piercing and tattooing

Always check that needles used in tattooing, body piercing, ear piercing, electrolysis and acupuncture are either new or properly sterilised. Ask about this before you have any of these procedures.



## To find out more

- The AIDS Hotline – 24-hour at 0800 80 AIDS (0800 802 437) or (09) 358 0099
- The New Zealand AIDS Foundation at [www.nzaf.org.nz](http://www.nzaf.org.nz)
- Sexual health centres at [www.nzshs.org/clinics](http://www.nzshs.org/clinics)
- Family Planning Association (FPA) at [www.familyplanning.org.nz](http://www.familyplanning.org.nz)
- Your doctor
- New Zealand Prostitutes Collective at [www.nzpc.org.nz](http://www.nzpc.org.nz)
- Pacific Island AIDS Trust
- Injecting drug user community groups
- Ministry of Health at [www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/hiv-and-aids](http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/hiv-and-aids)

This resource is available from [www.healthed.govt.nz](http://www.healthed.govt.nz) or the Authorised Provider at your local DHB.

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