

Positive, Now What?

What Is HIV/AIDS?

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a virus that can infect the body and can sometimes lead to AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). Over time, HIV attacks and weakens the immune system making an infected person vulnerable to a variety of infections and cancers. This stage of HIV infection is called AIDS.

What Does Having HIV/AIDS Mean for My Health?

Today, HIV is a manageable disease. HIV medications have significantly changed the course of HIV infection since the early days of the epidemic. With the proper care and treatment, you can live a healthy life. Without treatment, HIV advances in stages, overwhelming your immune system and getting worse over time. The three stages of HIV infection are: (1) acute HIV infection, (2) clinical latency and (3) AIDS.

People living with HIV may progress through these stages at different rates depending on a variety of factors including their genetic makeup, how healthy they were before they were infected, how soon after infection they are diagnosed, and if they are linked to care and treatment. Seeing your health care provider regularly and taking HIV medications as directed can reduce your chances of progression to AIDS. Different health-related choices such as decisions to eat a healthy diet, exercise and not smoke are important to slow the progression of the disease. Prompt medical care prevents the onset of AIDS and some life-threatening AIDS-related conditions.

What Are The First Steps I Should Take To Manage My Infection?

Get Support. Receiving a diagnosis of HIV can be a life-changing event. People can feel many emotions – sadness, hopelessness and even anger. Allied health care and social service providers, often available by contacting your health care provider's office, will have the tools to help you work through the early stages of your diagnosis and begin to manage your HIV. Talking to others who have HIV may also be helpful. Find a local

HIV support group. Learn about how other people living with HIV have handled their diagnoses.

Ask Questions. People newly diagnosed with HIV infection have many questions. To help you understand your diagnosis and develop a list of questions for your doctor, visit: <https://www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics>.

Get Medical Care. Receiving routine medical care is very important when you are first diagnosed. You should begin HIV treatment as soon as possible after your diagnosis. Educating yourself on HIV transmission, treatment, and how to protect yourself and others are necessary steps when you are first diagnosed. Ensure you are receiving factual information on HIV to help yourself and others.

How Do I Find a Doctor?

Find an HIV care provider, even if you don't feel sick. Most HIV care in North Dakota is provided by infectious disease physicians. Providers can be found at this website: www.ndhealth.gov/STD/FindProvider.

Is There a Cure for HIV/AIDS?

No effective cure exists for HIV. But with proper medical care, HIV can be managed.

How Is HIV Managed?

Thanks to better treatments, people with HIV are now living longer with a better quality of life than ever before. Taking medicine to treat HIV, called antiretroviral therapy or ART, is recommended for all people with HIV. Taking medicine to treat HIV slows the progression of HIV and helps protect your immune system. The medicine can keep you healthy for many years and greatly reduces your chance of transmitting HIV to others if taken the right way, every day. The goal of HIV treatment is to achieve viral suppression, which means the amount of HIV virus in the body is very low or undetectable. If you are virally suppressed, the chance of transmitting HIV is extremely low.

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What Happens If I Don't Get Treated?

If you are not on treatment for your HIV infection, your immune system will not function appropriately. In addition, you will be more likely to transmit HIV to others. Without treatment, HIV-infected individuals become more susceptible to opportunistic infections (OIs). Having an OI may be a very serious medical situation, and its treatment can be challenging. Without treatment, the life span of someone infected with HIV is much shorter than those who are taking their HIV medications daily.

How Can I Protect Myself and Others?

Seeking routine medical care will give you the greatest chance to get and stay virally suppressed, live a longer, healthier life and reduce the chance of transmitting HIV to your partners.

HIV can spread from person to person during anal, vaginal or oral sex. HIV can also be spread while sharing needles or equipment used for drug use, tattooing or body piercing. In addition, HIV can be passed from an infected mother to her baby during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding. Using a condom, the right way every time you have sex, can protect others from getting HIV. HIV-negative partners can take daily medicine to prevent HIV (called pre-exposure prophylaxis or PrEP).

Additional things you should do to protect others include never sharing items that have come into contact with your blood such as needles, other drug equipment and personal items that might have blood on them, such as toothbrushes or razors. You should cover open cuts and sores on the skin to keep from spreading infectious blood or secretions. You also cannot donate blood, organs, tissue or semen. Remember, HIV is **not** spread by sneezing, hugging, holding hands, coughing, sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses, or through food or water.

Any blood spills, including dried blood, should be cleaned using a dilution of one part of household bleach to 10 parts of water for disinfecting the area. Gloves should be used when cleaning up any blood spills.

What Is HIV PrEP?

PrEP is a way for people who do not have HIV, but who are at substantial risk of getting it, to prevent HIV infection by taking a pill every day. The pill (brand name Truvada) contains two medicines (tenofovir and emtricitabine) that are used in combination with other medicines to treat HIV. When someone is exposed to HIV through sex or injection drug use, these medicines can work to keep the virus from establishing a permanent infection. When taken consistently, PrEP has been shown to reduce the risk of HIV infection in people who are at high risk by up to 92 percent. PrEP is much less effective if it is not taken consistently.

PrEP is a powerful HIV prevention tool and can be combined with condoms and other prevention methods to provide even greater protection than when used alone. But people who use PrEP must commit to taking the drug every day and seeing their health care providers for follow-up every 3 months.

I'm Pregnant. How Does HIV Affect My Baby?

HIV can be transmitted from mother to child during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding. If you have HIV, take medicines to treat HIV the right way, every day. If you are treated for HIV early in your pregnancy, your risk of transmitting HIV to your baby can be 1 percent or less. After delivery, you can prevent transmitting HIV to your baby by avoiding breastfeeding, since breast milk contains HIV. If you are HIV-negative but you have an HIV-positive partner and are considering getting pregnant, talk to your doctor about taking PrEP to help keep you from getting HIV.

Does Being Treated Mean I Am Immune to HIV?

No, it is possible to get another strain of the infection. This is called an HIV superinfection. The new strain of HIV can replace the original strain or remain along with the original strain. The effects of superinfection differ from person to person, and superinfection may cause some people to get sicker faster.

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Do I Need to Be Excluded from Work, Child Care, School or Other Activities?

No. Children should not be excluded unless otherwise recommended by the health department and/or a health-care professional. There are no exclusion criteria for employees with HIV. Employees should always practice standard precautions if a blood exposure were to occur.

Who Do I Need to Tell About My Infection?

It's important to disclose your HIV status to your sex and needle-sharing partners even if you are uncomfortable doing it. Communication with each other about your HIV status allows you and your partner to take steps to keep both of you healthy. Other individuals, such as employers, do not need to know of your infection.

How Do I Tell Others?

It can be an awkward conversation, but communicating with partners about your HIV status allows you and your partner to take steps to keep both of you healthy. It is recommended that any partners have HIV testing. There are excellent prevention opportunities, such as PrEP, for negative partners to help them stay HIV negative.

The North Dakota Department of Health can contact your partners, without releasing your information, to notify them that they have been exposed to HIV and provide information on how to get tested. Your health care provider may be able to help you notify your sexual partners as well.

If you want to have that conversation with your partner, chances are your partner will be open to the discussion if you're confident and bring up the topic without judgment. Don't wait until the heat of the moment to start talking about HIV. It's better to talk about it earlier rather than later—certainly before you have sex. Some people who are living with HIV have suggested that it helps to talk about their status earlier in the relationship rather than later. Disclosing you are HIV-positive after you've become close to someone can cause your partner to feel as though you have hidden something

important. Having the conversation shows that you care and want to keep your current partners safe and protected.

Resource: [CDC Conversation Starters](#)

What Support Services Are Available?

The Ryan White Program assists North Dakota residents living with HIV or AIDS with incomes below 400 percent of the federal poverty level to access confidential health and supportive services. These services include case management; outpatient medical care; medication assistance through AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP); oral health care; health insurance premiums; mental health and substance abuse services; medical transportation; and emergency assistance (rent and utilities). Visit www.ndhealth.gov/hiv to find a case manager in your area, or call 800.472.2180 for more information.

Additional Information

www.ndhealth.gov/HIV

www.cdc.gov/HIV

www.aids.gov

www.ndhealth.gov/STD/FindProvider

[CDC Living with HIV 101 Fact Sheet](#)