

The Health Corner: HIV & AIDS

What are HIV and AIDS?

- AIDS (Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) is caused by infection with HIV (human immunodeficiency virus). AIDS occurs some time (often years) after infection with HIV.
- AIDS includes a number of illnesses that a person can develop because his or her immune system is weakened by HIV infection. The more common of these are: pneumocystis pneumonia, Kaposi's sarcoma, cytomegalovirus infection, tuberculosis, esophageal candidiasis, cryptococcosis, and HIV encephalopathy.
- HIV destroys a type of blood cell (CD4+ or helper T cells). These cells help the immune system fight infections and cancers.
- HIV and AIDS were first identified in the early 1980s in the United States.
- While the epidemics are stabilizing in western countries, they are uncontrolled in many poor countries, particularly countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia.

What are the symptoms?

Many cases of AIDS are diagnosed when people are young adults in their mid-late 20's, which means they became infected with HIV when they were teenagers.

- A person infected with HIV may initially develop a mild illness (known as a seroconversion illness) consisting of muscle aches, low grade fever, headaches, and sometimes a rash. Swelling of the lymph glands may also occur. This flu-like illness usually subsides within a few weeks.
- Most infected people are then free of any symptoms for many years until they develop AIDS.
- When a person develops AIDS, symptoms may include a loss of appetite, diarrhea, weight loss, fever, lethargy, fatigue, or the specific symptoms of a number of illnesses that define AIDS.

How is it spread?

- HIV is present in blood and other body fluids including semen, vaginal fluid, and breast milk. A person who comes into contact with the blood or body fluids of a person infected with HIV may be at risk of infection. HIV can be passed on from one person to another through:
 - unprotected sex (anal and vaginal intercourse)
 - shared injecting equipment
 - pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding (from mother to child)
 - contaminated blood or blood products
 - contaminated piercing and medical equipment used on the body.
- HIV is not spread through casual contact at school, home, or the work place.

- HIV is not transmitted through air or water, sharing cups or cutlery, touching, kissing or hugging, or through bites of mosquitoes and other insects.

Who is at risk?

People at increased risk for HIV infection include:

- people who have unprotected sex especially with multiple partners
- sex partners of the above groups
- injecting drug users
- children born to infected mothers

How is it prevented?

To avoid coming into contact with HIV:

- practice safe sex. Use a condom and a water-based lubricant each time you have vaginal or anal intercourse.
- use sterile equipment if you inject drugs. Do not share needles, syringes, filters, spoons, swabs, or tourniquets.
- dispose of used injecting equipment in approved containers for sharps.
- use disposable impermeable gloves when cleaning up blood spills or giving first aid.
- wipe any blood spills with an absorbent paper towel and use detergent and water to clean up the site of the spill
- cover any sores, cuts or wounds with a waterproof dressing
- make sure that body piercing and tattooing is only done at shops that use new disposable equipment for each customer and proper methods of sterilization.

If you think you have been exposed to HIV

After contact with the virus, taking special HIV drugs may prevent infection. If you believe you have had a high-risk exposure, you can call **STD Toll-free Hotline 1-800-227-8922** for advice as soon as possible after the exposure.

How is it diagnosed?

- The only way to know whether you are infected is to be tested for HIV infection. The test is a simple blood test for HIV antibodies that can be done by your doctor or at the testing sites in your community.
- Tests can also detect the virus in the blood, and other tests are used to monitor the amount of HIV in the blood (that is, the viral load). Other special tests are usually required to diagnose an AIDS-defining illness.

I'm HIV positive. Where can I get information about treatment?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that you be in the care of a licensed health care provider, preferably one with experience treating people living with HIV. Your health care provider can assist you with treatment information and guidance.

Detailed information on specific treatments is available from the Department of Health and Human Services' **AIDSinfo**. Information on enrolling in clinical trials is also available at **AIDSinfo**. You may contact AIDSinfo by phone at 1-800-448-0440 (English and Spanish) or 1-888-480-3739 (TTY).

If you have HIV

- Do not donate blood, organs or other tissues.
- You must tell your partner if you are infected with a sexually transmissible infection (including HIV) before sex and always engage in safe sex.

For Information on HIV / AIDS

- **Your School Based Health Center** (860) 701-3771
- **Lawrence Memorial Hospital** (860) 442-0711 x2056
- **New London Health Department** (860) 447-2437
- **Planned Parenthood of New London** (860) 443-5820

HIV & STD Testing Centers:

<p>New London Department of Health and Social Services 120 Broad St Rm 222 New London, Connecticut 06320 860-447-2437 Public Health Department/Social Services Department</p>	<p>HIV Services: FREE, ANON, CONF, ORAL</p>
<p>Planned Parenthood of Connecticut Incorporated 45 Franklin St New London, Connecticut 06320 860-443-5820 800-230-7526 Clinic</p>	<p>HIV Services: ANON, CONF, ORAL</p> <p>STD Service: STD</p>
<p>New London Community Health Center 1 Shaws Cove New London, Connecticut 06320 860-447-8304 Public Health Department/Social Services Department</p>	<p>HIV Services: CONF</p> <p>STD Service: STD</p>

Services Offered

FREE	Free HIV Testing Services	ORAL	Oral HIV Antibody Testing Services
RAPD	Rapid HIV Antibody Testing Services	ANON	Anonymous HIV Antibody Testing Services
CONF	Confidential HIV Antibody Testing Services	STD	STD Testing