

## **AIDS and HIV Fact Sheet**

AIDS is caused by a virus called HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)

When a person is infected with HIV, the virus infects and can kill certain cells in the immune system called T-helper cells. This weakens the immune system so that other opportunistic infections can occur. The HIV-infected person is said to have AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) when they become sick with other specific infections or when the number of T-helper cells has dropped below 200.

People at highest risk of AIDS and HIV infection are:

People who share needles

Men who have sex with other men

Babies born to mothers who have HIV infection

People who received blood transfusions or blood products before 1985

Anyone who has sex with anyone who has or is at risk for AIDS or HIV infection

HIV is in blood and other body fluids

The virus is in the blood, semen, menstrual blood, vaginal secretions, and breast milk of HIV infected persons. The virus can be there even if the person has no symptoms of HIV-infection or AIDS. People who are infected with HIV will carry (and be able to pass on) the virus for the rest of their lives.

HIV is spread by exposure to HIV infected blood and HIV infected body fluids

HIV can be spread during sex, by sharing needles to inject drugs, or from mother to baby (before or during birth, or by breast feeding). HIV is rarely spread by getting stuck by a used needle, or by getting blood or other infected body fluids onto a mouth, eyes, or broken skin. The virus is not spread by casual contact like living in the same household, or working with a person who carries HIV.

Certain symptoms and conditions may be associated with HIV/AIDS

These symptoms and conditions may include: fever, weight loss, swollen lymph glands in the neck, under arms or groin, white patches in the mouth (thrush), certain cancers (Kaposi's sarcoma, certain lymphomas, certain invasive cervical cancers), and infections (Pneumocystis pneumonia, certain types of meningitis, toxoplasmosis, certain blood infections, TB, etc.).

A blood test may tell if you have HIV infection or AIDS

You can get a HIV blood test at your doctor's office or at Counseling and Testing Sites throughout Maryland. Call your local health department or the AIDS Hotline (1-800-638-6252) for information.

There is treatment for people with HIV infection and AIDS

Many drugs are available to treat the infections and cancers associated with AIDS. There are also drugs available for people with HIV infection that can help prevent them from getting sicker.

HIV and AIDS are preventable

Abstaining from sex, monogamy (having sex with one uninfected partner who only has sex with you), and use of barrier protection (condoms) are the most protective prevention strategies.

People who use injection drugs should try to quit. Otherwise, never share needles.

People with HIV or AIDS should discuss their HIV status with their doctors and dentists, and inform their sex and needle sharing partners.

Women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy are encouraged to talk with their doctor about getting tested for HIV. If a mother is known to be infected with HIV, there is treatment to decrease the chance that her baby will become infected.

Practices called Universal Precautions and Standard Precautions, such as the use of gloves, goggles, gowns, etc., are used by health care practitioners for prevention of transmission of any communicable disease including HIV.

Free education and literature are available from 410-799-1940.