

Basics of HIV and AIDS

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What is HIV, what is AIDS?

HIV : Human Immunodeficiency Virus

(Gradually affects our immune system, i.e. the ability to fight infections/diseases)

AIDS

A - **Acquired**

I - **Immune**

D - **Deficiency**

S - **Syndrome**

– A condition caused by deficiency in body's immune system due to HIV.

– It is a syndrome: a group of symptoms of various illnesses.

Routes of transmission of HIV

- **Unprotected sexual intercourse with an infected person**
 - Both men and women at risk
 - Women more at risk
 - Risk increases further in the presence of STIs
 - Anal intercourse- higher risk
- **Transfusion of infected blood/blood products**
 - Fastest rate of transmission
 - Can happen through blood transfused or use of unsterilized infected needles / syringes

Routes of transmission of HIV contd.....

- **Sharing of Infected needles/syringes**
 - Small amounts of contaminated blood left in needles or syringes can carry the HIV virus from user to user. Among IDUs, transmission occurs by sharing drug paraphernalia.
- **From infected mother to the baby**
 - During pregnancy in womb;
 - During birth; and
 - Post- delivery through breast milk

How HIV does not spread?

- **HIV does not spread by normal social contact**
 - Shaking hands
 - Living together in the same house / hostel
 - Sharing clothes/towels
 - Sharing toilets
 - Eating together
 - Through mosquitoes bite
- **Sharing equipment** (telephone, computers, machines etc.)
- **Kissing**
 - Does not spread by social kissing as viral load in saliva is low
 - In the presence of ulcers in the mouth or bleeding gums - deep kissing or French kissing may be risky

Progression from HIV infection to stage of AIDS

Normal Healthy Individual



Gets infected with HIV



WINDOW PERIOD (3-12 weeks or even 6 months)

(Antibodies to HIV not yet developed, test does not capture the real status but person can infect others)



HIV Positive

(Development of antibodies, can be detected in test)

No exclusive symptoms (mild fever or flu like features in some cases)



May take up to 10 to 12 years to reach the stage of **AIDS**, the period can be prolonged through available treatment

Major Signs / Symptoms of AIDS:

- **(A) Major Signs:**
 - Weight loss (> 10% of body weight)
 - Fever for longer than a month
 - Diarrhea for longer than a month
- **(B) Minor Signs:**
 - Persistent cough
 - General itchy skin diseases
 - Thrush in mouth and throat
 - Recurring shingles (herpes zoster)
 - Long lasting, spreading and severe cold sores
 - Long lasting swelling of the lymph glands
 - Loss of memory
 - Loss of intellectual capacity
 - Peripheral nerve damage

How does one find out his/her HIV status?

- Blood Test (ELISA/ Western Blot)
- Testing available in government hospitals/voluntary counseling and testing centers/private labs
- NOTE: False negatives are common during window period
(A person is infected but test does not show as antibodies are not yet developed in adequate quantity. So, test does not show positive, even if one is infected. Period is generally 3 months, may be 6 months in some)
- Policy on HIV Testing:
 - Testing should be voluntary
 - Testing should be with pre and post test counseling
 - Test results should be kept confidential

Treatment for HIV and AIDS

- AIDS is still incurable but treatment to prolong life available, called Highly Active Anti Retroviral Treatment (HAART).
- In Kenya, NASCOP has adopted a “Test & Treat” approach.
- With ART, life can be prolonged substantially with few opportunistic infections.
- ART is life long, treatment adherence is the key.
- ART is provided free of charge in all Public hospitals in Kenya.

The AIDS logo demonstrates:



Care and concern about HIV and AIDS for those who are living with HIV, for those who are ill, for those who have died and for those who care for and support those directly affected.

Hope - that the search for a vaccine and cure to halt the suffering will be successful.

Support for those living with HIV, for the continuing education of those not infected, for maximum efforts to find effective treatments, cures or vaccines, and for those who have lost friends, family members or loved ones to AIDS.



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