

# Diagnosed with **HIV?**

A photograph of a man and a woman looking at a document together. The man is in the background, wearing glasses and a grey shirt, looking down at the document. The woman is in the foreground, looking up at the document with a slight smile. The background is a soft, out-of-focus yellow and white.

**The New York City Health  
Department can help you  
and your partners**



# I. Assistance for patients with HIV and their partners

Learning that you are HIV positive and getting services and medical care is hard enough. Telling your partners about your HIV infection can seem overwhelming. The New York City Health Department can help you tell your partners and refer you to services you might need.

This brochure describes how the Health Department can assist you when you are diagnosed with HIV. It also contains information that will help you protect your partners (page 7), better understand and live with HIV/AIDS (page 12) and have children safely while HIV positive (page 18). Finally, you will find advice on where to get more information (page 21).

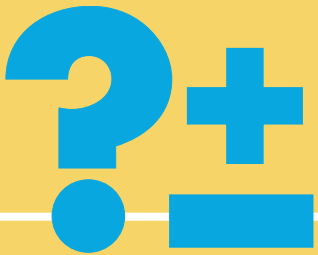
## 1. What can the NYC Health Department do for you?

If you are diagnosed with HIV, the Health Department can:

- Refer you to a doctor to help treat your HIV infection, if you do not have a doctor already.
- Refer you to social service agencies to help you obtain health insurance, housing, counseling, drug treatment, syringe-exchange services and more.
  - Help you choose the best option for telling your partners that you have HIV and the importance of your partners to learn about their own HIV status.
  - Assist you with getting your partner(s) tested for HIV. If you need any of these services, call the Health Department call-line at **(212) 442-6577**.

## 2. Where can I get HIV care?

- In NYC, you can see a doctor and get medicine for HIV/AIDS even if you do not have insurance or are not a legal immigrant.
- The Health Department can help you find a local New York State-designated center that specializes in the care of persons living with HIV/AIDS. These centers offer comprehensive care including, doctors, nurses, social workers, nutritionists and mental health specialists working together. You can get a list of these designated centers:
- Online at:  
**<http://home2.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/csi/hivtestkit-hcp-aidscenters-guide.pdf>**
- Or by calling the New York State Health Department AIDS Institute at **(518) 486-1383**



### 3. What is partner notification?

This service offers various options for informing your partners that they had sex or shared syringes with someone who has HIV and that they should get tested for HIV infection, too. At no time is your name disclosed to any partner or anyone else.

### 4. Who are my partners?

Your partners are anyone with whom you:

- Had oral, vaginal or anal sex
- Shared syringes

When a Health Department staff person asks you about partner notification, you can also get assistance for anyone you think could benefit from having an HIV test, including friends and relatives.

### 5. Why should I tell my partners that I am HIV positive?

Most HIV infections occur because people do not know that their sex or syringe sharing partner is HIV positive and don't take the necessary safety precautions. Often, people with HIV do not know that they themselves are infected and risk passing HIV to others.

You may feel nervous telling your partners that you are HIV positive. In that case, Health Department staff can assist you with notifying a partner. It is important for your partners to be notified so that they can get tested. If they learn they are HIV positive, they can get care and avoid passing HIV on to others without knowing it.

### 6. How can I make sure my partners know that they may have been exposed to HIV?

There are different options for notifying your partners and protecting your confidentiality:

#### i. Self-notification:

- You personally tell your sex or syringe-sharing partners that you are HIV positive.
- The Health Department will then contact your partners to make sure they know they had sex or shared syringes with someone who has HIV. We will also help them get an HIV test.

#### ii. Contract notification:

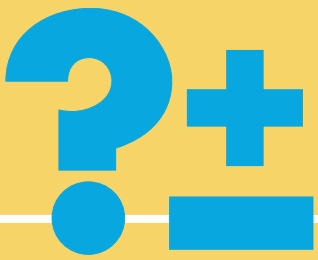
- You make an oral agreement with your doctor, nurse, counselor or the Health Department staff that you will tell your sex or syringe-sharing partners by a certain date that you are HIV positive.
- If you have trouble telling them, then your health care provider or the Health Department will help you do it.

#### iii. Provider-assisted notification:

- A health care provider or Health Department staff member will go with you to help you tell your sex or syringe-sharing partners that you are HIV positive.

#### iv. Anonymous notification:

- If you do not want your sex or syringe-sharing partners to know that you are HIV positive, the Health Department can help you notify your partners without ever telling your name or any other personal information.
- If you do not want the Health Department to know your name, you can call the Contact Notification Assistance Program (CNAP) for help telling your partners. However, you will need to give a number or a code word to your health care provider so that CNAP can confirm with your provider that you have HIV.
- You can reach CNAP at (212) 693-1419.



## 7. What are the benefits of partner notification?

- Knowing you did the right thing by helping your partners to get tested and to seek medical care.
- Letting your partners know that they had sex or shared syringes with someone who is HIV positive so that they can learn what they need to do next.
- Helping your partners learn about free HIV testing (anonymous or confidential).
- Knowing your partners can get medical care and start medication, if needed.
- Helping your partners learn how to protect themselves from getting HIV or passing it on to other people in the future.

## 8. Who will know that I am HIV positive?

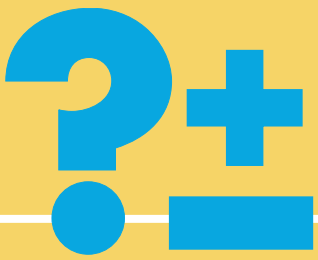
- No one at the NYC Health Department will tell anyone your name. It is against the law for the Health Department to reveal the name of anyone with HIV infection.
- If anyone does so, the department and staff member would face stiff personal fines and penalties (up to \$5,000 for each revealed name). A worker could lose his or her job for revealing the name of anyone with HIV.
- The NYC Health Department cannot give your name to any local, state or federal agency, including any immigration services agency.

## 9. Where can my partners go for HIV testing?

Your partners can get tested:

- At NYC Health Department clinics for sexually transmitted diseases (STD) or tuberculosis
- At NYC's public hospitals: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/hhc/html/facilities/map.shtml>
- By a Health Department staff person at your home or any convenient location of your choosing
- By calling 311 for more information about where to get an HIV test.





## II. Protecting your partners

### 10. What can I tell my partners about HIV testing?

- An HIV test tells you if a person's blood or oral fluid contains antibodies for HIV. Antibodies are proteins the body makes to fight illnesses. HIV antibodies are only made if HIV is present in the person's blood.
- Rapid tests take 20 minutes, but if the test result is positive you will need further testing to confirm that you are infected with HIV.
- Conventional tests take 1-2 weeks before the results are ready.
- What does it mean if my partner's HIV test result is **negative**?
  - This means your partner does not have HIV unless he or she was infected in the last 3 months. It can take 3 months from the time a person is infected for HIV to show up in rapid or conventional HIV tests. If you had unprotected sex or shared syringes within that time, your partner might still be infected and should be retested in 3 months.
- What does it mean if my partner's HIV test result is **inconclusive** or **indeterminate**?
  - It means the test could not be called positive or negative and should be repeated within 1 month. This may occur in a person with recent HIV infection.
  - Let your doctor know if you have concerns about HIV infection. Additional tests can help determine if HIV is present.
- If my partner's HIV test result is **positive**, what should he or she do?
  - This result means that your partner is infected with HIV. It is important for your partner to see a doctor regularly to get the HIV care they need. (Please see page 15.)

Now that you are living with HIV, there are steps you can take to protect your partners. Remember that you can pass HIV by having oral, vaginal or anal sex, or by sharing syringes.

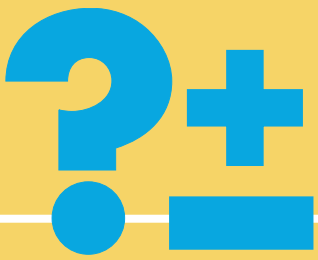
Mothers who are HIV positive can also pass HIV to their babies. Taking HIV medicines can make this less likely. If you are pregnant and have HIV, talk with your doctor immediately. (See Section IV on page 18.)

### I. How can I protect my sex partners from getting HIV?

Avoid having sex. The only sure way to keep from spreading HIV to your sex partners is to avoid all oral, anal or vaginal sex. If you do have sex, you should:

- Limit the number of oral, vaginal or anal sex partners you have.
- Tell your partners that you are HIV positive. Your partners need to get tested for HIV at least once a year.





#### • Have Safer Sex

- *Always use a latex condom when you have vaginal or anal sex. Without a condom, you are 20 times more likely to give HIV to your partner.*
- *Use a water-based lubricant (like K-Y Jelly) with a condom to lower the chance that the condom will break.*
- *Use a condom, or any latex or plastic barrier, if you have oral sex.*
- *If you do not use a condom during oral sex, tell your partner not to swallow the semen. Your partner should not perform oral sex if they have cuts or sores in their mouth.*
- *Avoid sexual activities that could cause either partner to bleed, for example dry sex, fisting or cutting.*
- *Avoid having sex during your monthly period (or your partner's period).*

- *Avoid sharing sex toys and wash any sex toys with bleach, alcohol or soap and water after each use with your partner.*
- *Do not ejaculate (“cum”) inside your partner’s vagina, anus or mouth if you are having sex without a condom. Remember that pre-cum also contains HIV which can be passed to your partner. Condoms can stop the spread of HIV through cum or pre-cum.*
- *Talk to a health care provider such as a doctor or nurse. He or she can answer your questions about having safer sex.*

## 2. I have heard that some kinds of sex can pass HIV more than other kinds of sex. Is that true?

Yes, when you have anal or vaginal sex without a condom you are more likely to pass HIV to your partners than when you have oral sex. Though oral sex is less risky than anal or vaginal sex, some infections have occurred among people who gave oral sex (blow jobs) to their partners.

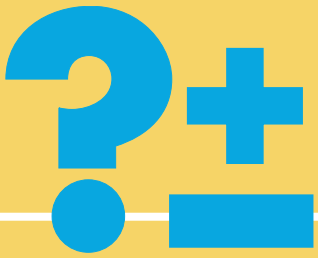
### Men with HIV:

- You are 100 times more likely to pass HIV if you put your penis in your partner’s anus than if you have oral sex.
- You are 20 times more likely to pass HIV if you put your penis in your partner’s vagina than if you have oral sex.
- You are 13 times more likely to pass HIV if your partner puts his penis in your anus than if you have oral sex.

### Women with HIV:

- You are 10 times more likely to pass HIV if your partner puts his penis in your vagina than if you have oral sex.
- You have a very low risk of passing HIV if you have sex with another woman, but it is important to avoid sex during your or your partner’s period.





### 3. Do drugs and alcohol increase my chance of transmitting HIV?

Yes.

- Being drunk or high during sex makes it harder to think clearly, harder to make good decisions and harder to put on a condom.
- *Do not share syringes or other equipment (or works) if you inject drugs, steroids or hormones.* You can get clean syringes at drug stores and pharmacies without a doctor's prescription. You can also get free syringes and works at any New York syringe-exchange program. Call 311 or 1-800-LIFENET (1-800-543-3638), for a list of these programs. Talk to your doctor about getting help to stop using drugs.

### 4. Can medicines reduce my risk of transmitting HIV?

- If you have a sexually transmitted disease (STD) and are HIV positive, you are more likely to pass HIV to your partners. Any STD makes it easier for HIV to pass from one person to another. Antibiotics can help cure most STDs (gonorrhea, syphilis, chlamydia, etc). Being treated for your STD will help lower your risk of passing HIV to your partners. If your penis or vagina has sores, discharge or itches, do not have sex until you get treated by a doctor and the sores or discharge are gone.
- If you have herpes, get treated. Herpes sores make it easier for HIV to spread. There is no cure for herpes but medicines reduce how often you have sores and can help to stop the spread of HIV to your partners. Please talk to your health care provider about treatment.
- If you are taking medicine for HIV and your viral load (the amount of virus in your blood) is undetectable, the risk of passing on HIV is lower. However, there is a chance that you could still pass HIV to your partners, so always use condoms, no matter how low your viral load.

### 5. What can my partners do to protect themselves?

Your partners should:

- Practice safer sex and never share syringes.
- Get tested for HIV at least once a year.
- Get treated for STDs including those that cause itching, discharge or sores on their penis or vagina.

### 6. What can my partner do if we have unprotected sex or the condom breaks?

There are medicines available to prevent HIV infection if this happens, but you must see a doctor before you can get them. These medicines must be started as soon as possible and no later than 72 hours after you have unprotected sex or the condom breaks. Call your doctor right away. If you are not able to reach your doctor, you can speak to someone at a non-profit health center called Callen-Lorde: **(212) 271-7181**. The sooner the medicines are started, the more likely it is that they can stop you from becoming infected with HIV.

Remember that these medicines can have unpleasant side effects. Using condoms is the best way to avoid HIV infection if you are having sex.

# III. Understanding and coping with your HIV diagnosis

This section answers some questions you might have about HIV so that you can learn how to better take care of yourself. It will help you understand what treatment you can get and some of the words your doctor uses.

Common questions about HIV/AIDS:

## 1. What is HIV?

- *HIV* stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus.
- It is the virus that causes AIDS.
- HIV attacks the immune system.
- The immune system is the part of your body that fights off infections. It is made up of special cells and organs.
- HIV destroys T cells (also called CD4 cells) that the immune system needs to keep us healthy and fight infections. (See Question 9 on page 16.)

## 2. What is AIDS?

- *AIDS* stands for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome.
- This is the most serious stage of HIV infection.
- It usually takes 5-10 years after becoming infected for the illness to reach this stage.
- When a person has AIDS, HIV has made his or her immune system so weak that it has trouble fighting certain infections that it could normally overcome. A doctor says a person has AIDS when the patient has:
  - An opportunistic infection (see Question 3 on the next page) and/or
  - A CD4 cell count below 200 or a CD4 percentage below 14 (see Question 9 on page 16)

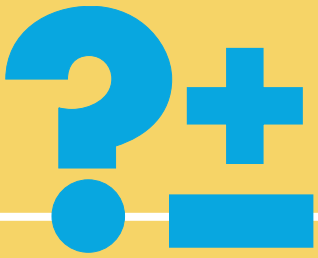
## 3. What are opportunistic infections?

- These infections can take advantage of immune systems that have been weakened by HIV. A healthy immune system would usually defend against these illnesses.
- A person with HIV who gets an opportunistic infection is diagnosed with AIDS.
- Some common opportunistic infections include:
  - **Tuberculosis** (an infection that usually affects the lungs)
  - **PCP** (*Pneumocystis*, a type of pneumonia, which affects the lungs)
  - **MAC** (*Mycobacterium avium*, a bacterial infection which can affect the whole body)
  - **Toxoplasmosis** (an infection of the brain)

For more information on these infections, go to:

<http://www.aids.org/factSheets/500-Opportunistic-Infections-Category.html>





#### 4. How is HIV passed from one person to another?

- HIV is found in semen (“cum”), vaginal fluids, blood and breast milk. It can pass from person to person through any of these fluids.
- There are 3 main ways that this can happen:
  - Sex (oral, vaginal or anal sex without a condom with a person who has HIV)
  - Drugs (sharing syringes with a person who has HIV)
  - Mother to child (a mother with HIV can pass it to her infants during pregnancy, labor, breastfeeding or from pre-chewing her children’s food)

#### 5. Can HIV be cured?

No, there is no cure for HIV, but if you take your medication every day, you can live a long, productive life.

#### 6. Can HIV be treated?

- Yes. Ask your doctor if you should be treated and what types of medicines are right for you.
- Treatment can include medicines that targets HIV itself and medicines that target some opportunistic infections.
- If you are taking medication and stop for any reason, call your doctor immediately. Stopping your medication can be harmful (see Question 8 on next page).

#### 7. Why should I see a doctor if I am HIV positive?

- A doctor will monitor your HIV infection and offer treatment when necessary so that you can live a healthier life.
- Your doctor works with a team of health care providers that can help you get services you need, such as health insurance, housing, mental health care and medical treatment.
- New York City has 37 hospitals designated as centers to treat people with HIV/AIDS. You can find a complete list at:
  - [http://hospitals.nyhealth.gov/browse\\_search.php?form=CENTER&rt=5#refine](http://hospitals.nyhealth.gov/browse_search.php?form=CENTER&rt=5#refine)
  - Or call the New York State Health Department AIDS Institute at (518) 486-1383
- Other providers who specialize HIV care can be found at [www.hitesite.org](http://www.hitesite.org)

#### 8. How can I stay healthy when living with HIV?

- The most important thing you can do for yourself is to see a doctor regularly.
- It is very important that you take your HIV medicines every day, that is, adhere to your medicines. If you miss any doses, you should tell your doctor immediately. Your doctor can work with you to help make sure you do not miss any doses.
- Stopping your HIV medication or missing doses will allow the amount of virus in your blood to increase, which can make you sick.
- Stopping HIV medication or missing doses may also cause your virus to become resistant to the medication, that is, make your medicine not work in the future.
- If you have AIDS, you may have to take medicines to prevent certain opportunistic infections such as PCP, MAC and toxoplasmosis. (See Question 3 on page 13.)



- Vaccinations are also an important way to stay healthy and prevent infections. Some of the vaccines you should get if you are HIV positive are:

#### **Type of vaccine**

- Flu shot
- Pneumonia shot
- Hepatitis A shot
- Hepatitis B shot
- Tetanus shot

#### **How often**

- Yearly
- Every 5 years
- Discuss with your doctor
- Discuss with your doctor
- Every 10 years

### **9. What is a CD4 cell (also called T cell)?**

- A special cell of the immune system
- This is the part of the immune system that HIV attacks and destroys.
- A normal CD4 cell count is between 500 and 1500.

### **10. Why will my doctor check the CD4 cell count?**

- This blood test tells you and your doctor how much your immune system has been damaged by HIV.
- The CD4 count helps your doctor decide if you need HIV medicine and if on medication to see if they are working.
- Even if you do not need any medicines, you should see your doctor regularly (every 3 to 6 months).
- If you start taking HIV medicines, your doctor may need to see you more often to make sure there are no problems with the medicines.

### **11. Why will my doctor check the HIV viral load?**

- This test measures the amount of HIV in your blood.
- The goal of HIV medicines is to lower the amount of virus in your blood to “undetectable” levels. Your doctor needs to check how close you are to this goal. If you have an undetectable viral load, you will remain healthier.

### **12. Does an undetectable viral load mean I am cured of my HIV?**

- No, undetectable only means the amount of HIV in your blood could not be measured by the test. This means treatment has been as successful as possible, but it does not mean you are cured. Some HIV will always remain in the body. HIV lives in places where we cannot check with a routine blood test, such as organs of your immune system, such as lymph nodes or in vaginal fluids and semen (“cum”).
- When your viral load is undetectable, you are less likely to pass HIV to your partners, but you are still capable of infecting them. It is still very important to use condoms every time you have anal or vaginal sex.
- If you stop taking your medicines, the amount of virus in your blood will go back up.

## IV. Facts about having children when you are living with HIV

### 1. Can I have a healthy baby if I am HIV positive?

If you want to have a baby, it is important to talk to your doctor. Even though you are HIV positive, it is possible to have a baby who is HIV negative. Your doctor can help you make this decision and have your baby safely.

- Men with HIV: With the help of your doctor, your sperm sample can be “washed” to remove HIV before being placed into your partner’s womb. Please contact your doctor to plan ahead of time.
- Women with HIV: If your partner is HIV negative, there are ways to place the sperm directly into your womb. Once you are pregnant, it is important to take HIV medication as prescribed by your doctor to avoid passing HIV on to your baby.

### 2. When is HIV passed from mother to baby?

If you are pregnant, you can pass HIV to your baby. However, there are ways to stop this from happening. (See “5. How can I protect my baby from getting HIV?” on page 20). HIV passes from mother to baby during:

- Pregnancy
- Labor (when you give birth). This is when most babies get infected.
- Breast-feeding
- Pre-chewing a baby’s food

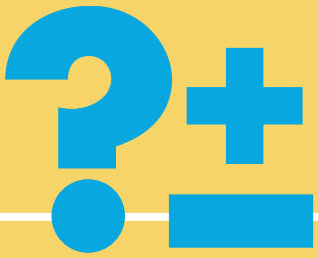
### 3. If I have HIV, will I pass it to my baby if I do not take HIV medicine?

You have a 1 in 4 chance of passing HIV to your baby if you do not take your HIV medicine.

### 4. Do my chances of passing HIV to my baby change if I take HIV medicine?

Yes, you have only a 1 in 100 chance of passing HIV to your baby if you take HIV medicines.





## V. Resources

### 5. How can I protect my baby from getting HIV?

- See a doctor regularly for prenatal (before birth) care.
- If you are planning on getting pregnant or once you find out you are pregnant
  - Take your HIV medicines every day.
  - Do not breastfeed and talk to your doctor about feeding your baby with formula.
  - Do not pre-chew your baby's food.
  - Give your baby his or her medicines as prescribed.

### 6. What else can I do to make sure I have a healthy baby?

- Take your prenatal vitamins.
- Exercise and eat healthily.
- Do not smoke, drink alcohol or use other drugs not prescribed by your doctor.

### 7. What questions should I ask my doctor?

Ask your doctor:

- When should I start taking HIV medicines?
- How long will I have to take HIV medicines?
- What is my HIV viral load?
- Do I need to have a caesarian section (c-section) because I am HIV positive?
- When should my baby be tested for HIV?
- What kind of test will you use to check my baby for HIV?
- When will I know for sure whether or not my baby has HIV?

### Partner notification services

- Health Department call-line: **(212) 442-6577**
- Health Department Contact Notification Assistance Program (CNAP): **(212) 693-1419**

### General information and materials on HIV and where to get an HIV test

- Dial 311

### Mental Health and Substance Use services

- **1-800-LIFENET** (1-800-543-3638), for help with drug or alcohol abuse, depression or other mental health problems

### Services for people living with HIV/AIDS

- HITE directory: [www.hitesite.org](http://www.hitesite.org)
- Ryan White directory: [www.ryanwhitenyc.org](http://www.ryanwhitenyc.org)



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