

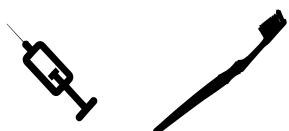
This document features basic information about how HIV is transmitted, how it is prevented and how to reduce the risk of transmission in sexual relations, whether or not you live with HIV.

How is HIV transmitted?

Sexual transmission: unprotected vaginal, anal and oral penetration.



Blood-borne transmission: sharing syringes, sharp material for personal use that contains blood; use of unsterilised materials for tattoos or piercings.



Mother to child: during pregnancy or birth, or while breastfeeding.

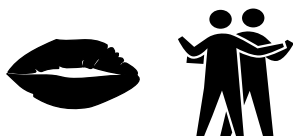


How HIV is NOT transmitted?

HIV is NOT transmitted by sleeping in the same bed, sharing food or using the same WC.



HIV is NOT transmitted by holding hands, hugging or kissing an infected person.



HIV is NOT transmitted by working, going to school or playing sport with infected people.



HIV is NOT transmitted by mosquito bites.



What fluids are most likely to transmit HIV?

- Blood (including menstrual blood)
- Semen
- Vaginal fluids
- Maternal milk

What fluids do NOT transmit HIV?

- There is no risk of HIV being transmitted in saliva, urine, sweat or tears.
- Pre-ejaculatory liquid may contain the virus, although not in sufficient quantity to transmit HIV.

How does HIV transmission occur?

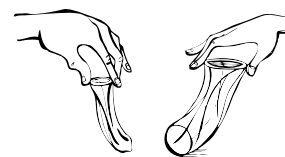
Sexual transmission of HIV occurs when the level of virus in the blood, semen or vaginal fluids is high enough to enter a person's blood stream, normally through the mucous membranes or small tears in the vagina, anus, rectum, mouth or the skin.

HIV cannot pass through the skin. However, because HIV is so small, it can pass through some parts of the body covered in mucous membranes (like the anus and the rectum, the vagina, the penis, the mouth and the eyes) and therefore enter the blood stream.

Once HIV has been exposed to air or water, it cannot survive outside the organism. The virus CANNOT therefore be acquired in bathrooms or by using cutlery, glasses, towels or sheets that have previously been used by a person with HIV.

How to prevent transmission

Use a male or female condom.



If male and female condoms are used correctly and do not break, they are proven methods of preventing HIV transmission and most sexually transmitted infections.



Use of water-soluble lubricants reduces the risk of condoms breaking and eases penetration, which makes it more comfortable and pleasurable for many people.



Risk of transmission

Some practices are thought to involve more risk than others. Examples are sexual penetration without a condom or sharing syringes, when compared to use of a condom in sex or the personal use of new or sterilised syringes. The following equation (which helps to illustrate the three conditions required for possible transmission of the virus) helps to understand the risk of HIV transmission.

Body fluids with high levels of HIV

- Blood (including menstrual blood)
- Semen
- Vaginal fluids
- Maternal milk



Practice /Situation

- Unprotected anal or vaginal penetration
- Shared use of syringes
- Pregnancy
- Birth
- Breastfeeding



Direct contact of the virus with the blood stream

- Vaginal mucus
- Anal mucus
- Urethral mucus (in the penis)
- Open cuts and wounds
- Other body mucus
- Lesions produced by other STDs
- Syringe injection points



Risk of HIV transmission

The three conditions required to increase the risk of HIV transmission are:

- A body fluid with a high concentration of HIV.
- An activity or situation in which fluid containing the virus comes into contact with another person's body.
- Direct contact of the body fluid with another person

What sexual practices involve the greatest risk of HIV transmission?

High risk

- Anal penetration without a condom
- Vaginal penetration without a condom
- Vaginal or anal penetration with irregular use of a condom
- Vaginal or anal sex involving incorrect use of a condom
- Sharing sex toys without a condom for each new use or without cleaning them enough

Low risk

- Oral sex on a man without a condom, with or without ejaculation. The risk of transmission increases if there are tears in the oral mucus membranes of the person giving oral sex.
- Unprotected oral sex on a woman
- Unprotected oral-anal sex

What is the probability of HIV transmission?

It is difficult to calculate the exact risk of HIV transmission for each person in any given situation. The transmission equation shown above can be useful for evaluating individual risk of infection. Below are some factors that may also increase the risk of HIV infection:

- Having a sexually transmitted infection (even with no symptoms) increases the risk of transmitting or contracting HIV in a sexual act.
- People recently infected with HIV have higher levels of the virus in the blood. There is therefore a higher probability

of HIV transmission during the acute phase of infection (unless correct preventive measures are taken).

- People who have unprotected sex with more than one partner in a short period of time have more chance of transmitting or contracting HIV.
- Biologically, women are more vulnerable than men to HIV through sex.

Reducing the risk of HIV transmission

Although using a condom is the safest way of preventing HIV transmission, for some people it is not always a realistic or desirable option. If this is the case, it is still possible to reduce the risk of HIV transmission or re-infection. For people who do not use condoms or do not always use them, reducing risk is an alternative to taking no precautions.

When a condom is not available it is better to:

- Perform sexual practices such as mutual masturbation that do not involve penetration.
- Practice oral sex rather than vaginal or anal penetration.
- Use lubricant in penetration.
- Have insertive rather than receptive sex.
- Have non-ejaculatory rather than ejaculatory sex.
- Reduce the number of ejaculations in penetration.
- Reduce the number of times of unprotected sex with the same partner.
- Reduce the number of sexual partners with whom unprotected sex is practised.

Further information:

If you require more information on the prevention of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, please call the following free helplines:

- Spanish Red Cross: 900 111 000
- 900 Rosa: 900 601 601

Sources: *gTt / Aids Vancouver / Canadian AIDS Society.*

