



Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)

What is HIV?

HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. HIV can be passed from person to person during unprotected vaginal or anal sex with someone who has HIV.

Unprotected sex is when you have sex without a condom or without taking PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) as prescribed by the doctor. PrEP is a medication taken to prevent HIV for people at risk of becoming infected.

HIV can also be passed on from:

- mother to child during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding.
- piercing your skin with equipment that is not sterilised (sharing needles, drug injecting equipment and tattooing).

You cannot get HIV from kissing, hugging, holding hands, spitting, coughing, sneezing, toilet seats or sharing food or drinks.

How do I know if I have HIV?

Most people with HIV do not have symptoms so you may not know if you or your partner have HIV until you get an HIV test.

**There are several symptoms of HIV.
Not everyone will have the same symptoms.
Symptoms can include:**

- flu like symptoms
- a sore throat
- swollen glands
- a rash

Symptoms usually happen within a few weeks of being infected with HIV and can be a sign of your body trying to fight off the virus. If you have HIV for a long time without treatment you might get symptoms of AIDS.

HIV weakens the body's immune system which makes it hard for your body to fight off infections. Without proper treatment, HIV can develop into AIDS. AIDS stands for acquired immune deficiency syndrome. People who are on HIV treatment do not develop AIDS.

How can I protect myself from HIV?

- Use condoms during sex. Condoms will prevent HIV from being passed on. Make sure you change condoms between partners and when sharing sex toys.
- Do not share needles, syringes or other injecting equipment.
- Take PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) if you are at risk of HIV. PrEP is a medication taken to prevent HIV for people at risk of becoming infected. For more information on PrEP call the [Sexual Health Info Link](#) on 1800 451 624 (free call).
- Take PEP (post exposure prophylaxis) if you think you have been exposed to HIV. PEP is a medication you take for one month to reduce the risk of getting HIV. It is important to start it as soon as possible after you have had unprotected sex and no later than 72 hours after the event. For more information on PEP, call the [NSW PEP hotline](#) on 1800 737 669 (free call).
- Test for STIs and HIV every 3-12 months. Testing is important and part of a healthy confident sex life.



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Another way to prevent HIV is when a person with HIV takes HIV treatment. If taken correctly the amount of virus in the blood of a person with HIV is very low (undetectable) and cannot be passed on to sexual partners. Every person living with HIV can get free HIV treatment. For more information on HIV treatment and where to get it, you can talk to your doctor or call the Sexual Health Infolink on 1800 451 624 at no cost.

How do I test for HIV?

You can get an HIV test at your local doctor, a sexual health clinic and at some university health clinics. HIV is not tested for every time you have a blood test. You need to talk to your doctor to have an HIV test.

There are also options for [rapid HIV tests](#) and [dried blood spot \(DBS\) tests](#). DBS test is a free, easy and private way to test for HIV. Call the [Sexual Health Infolink](#) on 1800 451 624 to find a testing location near you.

HIV and STI tests are easy, confidential and nothing to be ashamed about. HIV status will not affect your student visa.

How do you treat HIV?

There is no cure for HIV but there is safe and effective treatment. HIV is treated with tablets or injection. This protects your immune system and prevents AIDS. HIV treatment can keep you healthy and help prevent passing it on to others. The sooner you start taking it, the better.

People with HIV who are on treatment have healthy long lives and can have children without risk of transmission to their partner or family.

Where can I find more information on HIV and STIs?

For information and support about STIs, HIV and your sexual health, you can call the [Sexual Health Infolink](#) on 1800 451 624 (free call) to speak to a specialist sexual health nurse. It's free, confidential, and non-judgemental. You can also visit the [International Student Health Hub](#).

If you're diagnosed with HIV, you're not alone. Services like [ACON](#), [Positive Life](#), [Multicultural HIV and Hepatitis Service \(MHAHS\)](#) and [Pozhet](#) offer support for people with HIV.

If you would like an interpreter to help you access health services or information, please contact the [Translating and Interpreting Service](#) on 131 450.

Scan the QR code to find out more about HIV and STIs.

