

HIV patient fact sheet

English
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Recently your doctor conducted a HIV Test, which has returned positive. This means you have contracted HIV. Having HIV does not mean you have AIDS. This result may be a shock and you probably have lots of questions that you want answered. Your doctor will be able to provide some answers and there is a list of organisations on the back of this sheet that can give you more information or help you contact other people with HIV who have been through this experience. The most important thing to remember is that you are not alone. Your doctor and these organisations can provide you with information and support.

What is HIV?

HIV is short for the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. It is the virus that can cause AIDS. Once HIV enters the body it attacks the immune system, breaking down its ability to fight disease and infections. If left untreated, HIV will lead to AIDS, which stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. AIDS develops when the immune system can no longer function to fight disease or infection.

How is HIV Spread

HIV can be spread through unsafe sex, through the sharing of needles and other drug injecting equipment, and through other blood-to-blood contact. It can also be transmitted from mother to baby. It is important to use condoms during sex, to avoid sharing drug-injecting equipment and to prevent any blood-to-blood contact. HIV cannot be transmitted casually such as by sharing eating utensils or by touch.

Monitoring your health

In order to discover how your body is coping with HIV it is crucial to monitor your health. A T-cell or CD4 cell count gives an indication of the damage to your immune system (by measuring the number of CD4 cells) and a Viral Load test indicates how much virus is in your system. It is important to note changes in these indicators so that treatments can be started or changed at the best times.

Treatment

HIV can be treated. There is now a range of drugs available that can control the virus and limit the amount of damage it can do to your immune system. These are called antiretroviral drugs. The aim of this treatment is to reduce your viral load (the amount of HIV in your blood) and to allow your immune system to repair any damage that has occurred (by increasing your CD4 cell count). Antiretroviral drugs are given in combination. To find out if and when it is necessary to begin treatment, you must work with your doctor to monitor your health.

Your Doctor

Your doctor has an important role to play. Your doctor is a good person to talk with about HIV in a private and confidential manner. She or he may be authorised to prescribe antiretroviral drugs. Authorised prescribers have undergone training on how to manage HIV, which allows them to prescribe antiretroviral drugs subsidised under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). If your doctor cannot prescribe HIV medications, then she or he can refer you to a doctor who can. If necessary, the Australasian Society for HIV Medicine (ASHM) can help you and your doctor locate a HIV specialist in your area.



Confidentiality

Your HIV test result is personal. You do not have an immediate obligation to tell anyone, although it is a legal requirement in NSW to inform your sexual partners of your status prior to having sex. Only in exceptional circumstances is it lawful for doctors, nurses or health care providers to tell anyone that you are HIV positive without your consent.

Someone to Talk To

You may like to start thinking about who you can talk to. As a person newly diagnosed with HIV, it is important to ask questions and find the kind of support that suits you. HIV/AIDS organisations offer a range of information and services including counselling, peer support or simply someone to talk to confidentially. They can also refer you to other services that may be more suitable. Remember, you are not alone. These are just a few organisations and groups that exist to provide you with information and support.

AIDS Council of NSW (ACON)

9 Commonwealth St,
Surry Hills, NSW, 2010
Tel: 02 9206 2000
(Free call) 1800 063 060
www.acon.org.au

ACON (AIDS Council of NSW) is a statewide community based organisation that offers counselling and other services. ACON can put you in contact with other positive people and offers specialised HIV support programs.

TELEPHONE HOTLINE

NSW info Line: 02 9332 9700
(Free call NSW) 1800 451 600
(TTY) 02 9332 4268

This Hotline is a confidential service that can provide you with HIV/AIDS information.

PLWH/A (NSW)

Room 5, Level 1
94 Oxford St, Darlinghurst
NSW, 2010
Tel: 02 9361 6011
(Free call NSW) 1800 245 677
www.plwha.org.au

PLWH/A (People Living With HIV/AIDS) is a consumer organisation, which represents people living with HIV. PLWH/A can assist you with information and referral.

Positive Heterosexuals

Level 5, Queen Mary Building
Grose St, Camperdown NSW 2050
Tel: 02 9515 3095
(Free call NSW) 1800 812 404

Positive Heterosexuals is a statewide peer support and education program for men and women with HIV/AIDS and their partners and family members.

Multicultural HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C Service

Level 5 Queen Mary Building
Grose St, Camperdown NSW 2050
Tel: 02 9515 3098
www.multiculturalhivhepc.net

The multicultural service provides support for people from a non-English speaking background living with HIV/AIDS, their families, partners and carers

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