

HIV

What is it?
How is it transmitted?
How is it treated?

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What is HIV?

HIV is a virus which attacks the immune system, and if left untreated weakens the body's ability to fight other infections and diseases.

How is HIV transmitted?

HIV is transmitted from one person to another when the blood, semen, pre-ejaculate (pre-cum), vaginal fluids, anal fluids or breast milk of an infected person enter the body of another person. HIV is most commonly transmitted by having sex without a condom. If someone is tested and found to be infected with HIV, they are said to be HIV positive.

What are the signs and symptoms of HIV?

Many people who are living with HIV have no obvious signs or symptoms. The most common symptoms are a fever, a rash and a severe sore throat all occurring within a few weeks of infection.

What is the test for HIV?

HIV testing in Sheffield involves taking a small sample of blood and sending it to the lab for analysis. The tests can provide reliable results from four weeks after possible infection and results are usually available within a few days. It is also possible to test using a saliva sample or pin-prick (blood-spot) test.

When should I have a test?

4 weeks after you become infected with HIV there will be enough antibodies and antigens in your blood to show up on an HIV test, even if you have no signs or symptoms. A repeat test at 8 weeks is recommended if you have been at high risk. Before you decide to have a test you may wish to talk to someone about the implications that this could have on all aspects of your life. Sexual Health Sheffield can help you with this.

What is the treatment for HIV?

HIV drugs - antiretroviral treatment (ART) or combination therapy - reduce the level of HIV in the blood and prevent or delay the development of HIV infection which can lead to AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). Most people with HIV who are on treatment have long and healthy lives.

Treatment can be given to a pregnant woman to prevent her from transmitting the virus to her baby during pregnancy.

If you have had sex without a condom with someone who is, or you think might be, HIV positive within the last three days (72 hours) then taking a course of anti-HIV drugs for 4 weeks may help to prevent infection. This is known as Post Exposure Prophylaxis or PEP. It is more effective the sooner you take it, and must be completed to be effective.

PEP may be considered if:

- you had oral sex with someone who is HIV positive or is at high risk of having HIV and they ejaculated in your mouth
- you had unprotected vaginal or anal sex with someone who is at high risk of having HIV
- you are a healthcare professional and have been at risk at work, for example through a needlestick injury

What happens if HIV is not treated?

If left untreated, a person living with HIV may well develop a range of serious illnesses and complications over time, resulting in an AIDS diagnosis and potentially death. It is also likely that if left untreated, the person would remain more infectious and more likely to pass the infection on to others.

Is there anything I can do to help myself?

By managing HIV well, most people with HIV can expect to lead a long and healthy life.

This means:

- Taking medication correctly
- Having annual flu jabs
- Being vaccinated against pneumonia
- Maintaining a healthy lifestyle – good diet, exercise, not smoking
- Looking after your mental health and reducing stress in your life

Can I still have sex?

Your sex life does not have to be over if you are diagnosed as HIV positive. The risk of transmitting HIV is greatly reduced if treatments are taken properly and if condoms are used according to instructions. However, there have been prosecutions for 'reckless' transmission of HIV in the UK, so people need to think carefully about telling sexual partners if they are HIV positive. Sexual Health Sheffield can help with this.

What about telling my partner(s)?

If the test shows that you have HIV then it is very important that your current sexual partner(s) and any other recent partners are also tested. Sexual Health Sheffield staff can help you with this and your confidentiality is protected.

How can I protect myself from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections?

The following measures can help to protect you from HIV and most other sexually transmitted infections, such as genital warts, chlamydia and gonorrhoea. If you have a sexually transmitted infection they will also help prevent you from passing it on to your partner(s):

- Use condoms every time you have vaginal or anal sex
- If you have oral sex, use a condom to cover the penis, or a dam to cover the anus or female genitals
- Any genital to genital contact between partners could pass on STIs. Using dams or condoms before sexual contact can prevent infection
- If you are not sure how to use condoms correctly visit **www.sexualhealthsheffield.nhs.uk**
- Avoid sharing sex toys. If you do share them, wash them or cover them with a new condom before anyone else uses them
- Arrange regular HIV/STI check-ups, especially at change/start of relationships with new sexual partners

What happens at Sexual Health Sheffield?

When you attend for your appointment, you will be asked to provide the following:

- Your name and how we can contact you - any details you provide will be treated confidentially
- During your visit you will be asked personal information so we can provide the relevant and appropriate care
- We have a duty of care to all our patients, so if you are 17 or under you will be asked relevant questions to assess your safety. If staff are concerned, they may talk to you about what to do about this and may contact other appropriate agencies. Sexual Health Sheffield will not tell your parents or carers that you have visited Sexual Health Sheffield

This is the service you can expect when you attend Sexual Health Sheffield:

- All advice, information, tests, condoms and treatments are free at Sexual Health Sheffield
- No one should judge you because of your sexual behaviour or lifestyle
- All our services are confidential
- All Sexual Health Sheffield workers are appropriately and fully trained NHS staff
- All tests are optional; no examination will take place without your permission
- Routine testing covers testing for all STIs
- Please ask questions to ensure you fully understand what services have been offered, what tests carried out and what treatments given

- You can have a chaperone to help you feel more comfortable – please ask
- Our friendly and professional staff are here to help you. We will give you as much support as you need (particularly if you need help on how to inform any partners)

If you feel that we have not met the above or want to give us any other feedback, please contact us via

www.sth.nhs.uk/patients/tell-us-what-you-think

Further information

www.sexualhealthsheffield.nhs.uk

0114 226 8888

NHS Choices website:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/Sexually-transmitted-infections/Pages/Introduction.aspx



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