



Questions and Answers (HIV/AIDS)

Q. What is HIV?

A. A virus that is the cause of AIDS. HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. HIV can be transmitted, or passed, from one person to another by only three ways: sexual contact, blood-to-blood contact, and the passing between mother and child. There are only a few fluids that are able to carry the virus they include: blood, semen, vaginal fluid, and breastmilk. HIV slowly destroys the parts of our body that help protect us from becoming sick.

Q. What is AIDS?

A. AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Defiance Syndrome. There are two definitions used to determine if a person has AIDS. A medical definition examines the extent of the virus in the body with a blood test, if it is very serious this will be AIDS. Another definition exists for those who are not in usual contact with blood tests, in this case when a person with HIV becomes very sick they are said to have AIDS.

Q. Do all people who carry HIV have AIDS?

A. No. A person can be living with HIV and not have AIDS. The Syndrome, AIDS, is like the effect of HIV, the cause. In fact, people who carry HIV are usually healthy for many years before the virus makes their body so weak that it becomes easily sick. HIV is not actually the sole cause of AIDS deaths, rather a combination of HIV weakening the body and another second infection taking the opportunity of a weakened body cause the death of a person.

Q. How is HIV transmitted?

A. Of the three ways the virus can be transmitted (sexual contact, blood-to-blood, and from mother-to-child) there are different concerns we need to be aware of. A transmission occurs when a person who does not carry the virus contacts a person who does carry the virus in one of those three ways. The virus is passed to the one who previously did not carry the virus. Almost all, 85%, of transmissions are due to sexual contact.

Q. How can I protect myself from transmissions?

A. The first step is to know our own HIV status. Once we know our own status we can change our lifestyle accordingly. Women expecting children who are living with HIV can seek treatment to reduce the probability of transmission to their children – many places offer this treatment free. We can sterilize or boil cutting instruments to kill the virus. However not sharing such instruments is best, this will prevent all these types of transmissions. In preventing sexual transmissions we can: have one partner who we know is also not carrying HIV, refrain from having sexual contacts, reduce the amount of sexual partners, know our partners status, and use protection/condoms.