

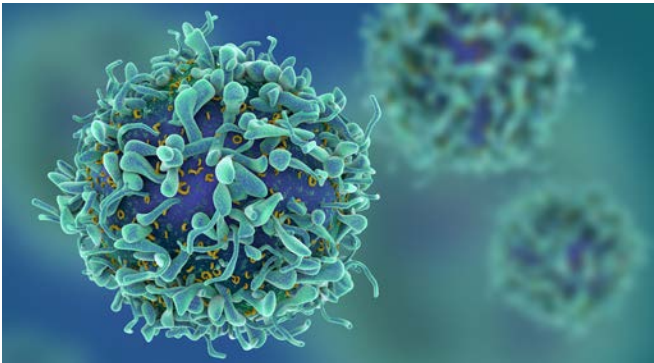
UNDERSTANDING HIV AND AIDS: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) and AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) are related but different conditions, and it is important to clearly understand the distinction.

HIV

HIV is a virus that attacks your body's immune system, specifically T-helper cells that help your body fight off infections and diseases. With proper medical treatment, people with HIV can live long, healthy lives and may never develop AIDS.

The key difference is that HIV is the virus itself, while AIDS is the condition that can develop if HIV goes untreated. Not everyone with HIV will develop AIDS, especially with today's effective treatments.



AIDS

AIDS is the final stage of HIV infection. It occurs when the immune system becomes so severely damaged that the body can no longer fight off certain infections and cancers.

HOW HIV IS TRANSMITTED

HIV is transmitted through specific body fluids: blood, semen, vaginal fluids, and breast milk. The virus cannot survive long outside the human body and is not spread through casual contact like hugging, shaking hands, or sharing food. When you choose abstinence, you eliminate the risk of HIV transmission through sexual contact entirely.

“**Abstinence is the only 100% effective way to prevent sexual transmission of HIV.**”



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

odphp.health.gov

Centers for Disease Control

www.cdc.gov/sti

HIV & AIDS

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in the know

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WHY TEENAGERS FACE A HIGHER RISK

Several factors put teenagers at increased risk for HIV infection.

- ❗ Many teens engage in risky behaviors without fully understanding the consequences.
- ❗ Young people often have multiple sexual partners over shorter periods.
- ❗ They may also be less likely to know their partner's HIV status or sexual history.

HOW TO MAINTAIN ABSTINENCE AND PREVENT HIV

Developing strong refusal skills is crucial for protecting yourself from HIV transmission. Start by being absolutely clear about your boundaries before you're in a situation where you might face pressure. Practice saying "no" confidently and directly. You might say, "I've decided to wait," or "I'm not ready for that kind of relationship."

- ▶ **Don't feel obligated to explain or justify your decision.** Your choice to abstain from sexual activity is valid and doesn't require elaborate explanations. Simple statements like, "That's not something I want to do," or "I'm not comfortable with that," are sufficient.
- ▶ **Have a support system ready.** Identify trusted friends, family members, or mentors you can talk to about relationship pressures. Having someone to call when you're feeling pressured can help you stick to your decision.
- ▶ **Avoid situations that might compromise your decision.** If you know certain environments or activities might lead to pressure to do something dangerous or uncomfortable, avoid them or have an exit plan. This might mean leaving parties early, avoiding being alone with someone who doesn't respect your boundaries, or having transportation arranged so you can leave if needed.



- ▶ **Practice responses to common pressure tactics.** People might say things like "everyone's doing it," or "if you really loved me, you would." Prepare responses like, "I care about both of us too much to take this risk," or "Someone who cares about me will respect my decision."
- ▶ **Remember that pressure is a red flag.** Anyone who truly cares about you will respect your choice to abstain from sexual activity. Persistent pressure, guilt trips, or attempts to manipulate you are signs of someone who doesn't respect you or your values.

YOUR HEALTH, YOUR CHOICE

Choosing abstinence is a powerful way to protect yourself from HIV while focusing on your education, goals, and personal growth. This choice demonstrates self-respect and responsibility for your health and future. Remember that you have the right to make decisions about your body, and those decisions deserve respect from others.

