

What Is the Difference?

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) attacks the body's immune system, specifically CD4+ T cells, also known as helper T-cells, which are crucial for fighting infections. HIV is the virus itself, while AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) is the advanced stage of HIV infection that occurs when the immune system becomes severely compromised.

A person can live with HIV for many years without developing AIDS, especially with proper medical care. With modern treatment, many people with HIV never progress to AIDS.



HOW IS HIV TRANSMITTED?

HIV is transmitted through specific bodily fluids from an infected person: blood, semen, vaginal fluids, rectal fluids, and breast milk. The most common ways HIV spreads include:

- Unprotected sexual contact (vaginal, anal, or oral sex) with an HIV-positive person
- Sharing needles, syringes, or other injection drug equipment
- Mother-to-child transmission during pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding
- Blood transfusions or organ transplants (extremely rare in countries with proper screening)

HIV cannot be transmitted through casual contact, saliva, tears, sweat, or sharing food and drinks.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

odphp.health.gov/

Centers for Disease Control

www.cdc.gov/sti/

in the know

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HIV & AIDS

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW





HOW TO PREVENT TRANSMISSION

Prevention is highly effective when proper measures are taken:

- Safe Sex Practices: Use condoms consistently and correctly during all sexual activities. Consider dental dams for oral sex.
- Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP): Daily medication for high-risk individuals that reduces HIV transmission risk by up to 99% when taken consistently.
- Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP): Emergency treatment taken within 72 hours of potential exposure, reducing transmission risk by approximately 80%.
- Regular Testing: Know your HIV status and that of your partners.
- Treatment as Prevention: People with HIV who maintain an undetectable viral load cannot sexually transmit the virus.

SYMPTOMS OF HIV

Most people have flu-like symptoms within 2 to 4 weeks after infection. Symptoms may last for a few days or several weeks. Possible symptoms include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Rash
- Sore throat and mouth sores
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Weight loss

Having these symptoms alone doesn't mean you have HIV. Some people have no symptoms at all. The only way to know if you have HIV is to get tested.



TREATMENT FOR HIV

Modern HIV treatment involves antiretroviral therapy (ART), which consists of a combination of HIV medicines taken daily. ART works by reducing the viral load in the body to undetectable levels, allowing the immune system to recover and function normally.

TREATMENT FOR AIDS

AIDS treatment focuses on both managing HIV with ART and treating opportunistic infections and cancers that occur due to the weakened immune system. This may include:

- Aggressive antiretroviral therapy to suppress HIV
- Medications to prevent common opportunistic infections
- Treatment of existing infections or cancers
- Immune system support and monitoring



LIVING WITH HIV

With proper medical care and adherence to treatment, people with HIV can live long, healthy lives. Key aspects include:

- Taking HIV medications as prescribed
- Regular medical monitoring and lab tests
- Maintaining a healthy lifestyle with proper nutrition and exercise
- Managing stress and mental health
- Building a strong support network
- Practicing safe sex to protect partners and prevent reinfection

LIVING WITH AIDS

While AIDS represents a more advanced stage of HIV infection, many people can still live fulfilling lives with proper medical care. This involves:

- Close collaboration with healthcare providers
- Taking necessary medications
- Regular monitoring for and treatment of opportunistic infections
- Nutritional support
- Psychological support
- Planning for long-term care needs