

# Raising awareness of HIV and AIDS

People are encouraged to practise safer sex and help prevent the spread of HIV. Get tested if you think you've put yourself at risk, as early diagnosis and treatment is important.

## **Viral infection**

HIV/AIDS is a viral infection caused by HIV retroviruses. It can be transmitted:

- through sexual contact
- through sharing of HIV-contaminated needles and syringes
- from mother to child before, during, or shortly after birth

Many people who are living with HIV have no obvious signs or symptoms. The only way of knowing if you have the virus is by taking a HIV test.

It's important not to delay seeking advice and taking this test if you feel you have been at risk.

People with HIV have a near-normal life expectancy if diagnosed early and treated promptly.

You can find out more about HIV on these pages:

## **Prevention and safer sex**

It is estimated that the majority of cases where the infection has been passed on are from those with undiagnosed HIV.

Once diagnosed, people are less likely to pass on their infection due to treatment and behaviour change. It's essential for both the person with HIV and those with whom they may have sex that the condition is diagnosed early.

It is also important to take steps to reduce your likelihood of getting HIV.

If you have unprotected sex, you could effectively be sleeping with everyone your partner's ever slept with, putting yourself at risk of getting HIV or another sexually-transmitted infection (STI).

If you're sexually active you should:

- use condoms
- limit the number of sexual partners
- get tested if you think you might be at risk

For information or advice on HIV, or to discuss any sexual health issue, contact your local [Genitourinary Medicine \(GUM\) clinic](#) or [your GP](#).

## More useful links