

# AIDS

*insights*

## Myths and Misconceptions

### Key Conc

**A** Acquired  
**I** Immuno-  
**D** Deficiency  
**S** Syndrome



**H** Human  
**I** Immuno-deficiency  
**V** Virus

**HIV is the virus which causes the condition called AIDS.**

**MYTH:** You can catch AIDS through casual contact with an HIV-infected person.

**TRUTH:** You cannot get HIV/AIDS through hugging. You cannot get HIV/AIDS through holding hands. You cannot get HIV/AIDS through coughing or sneezing. You cannot get HIV/AIDS through sharing cups, glasses and other eating utensils. You cannot get HIV/AIDS through



insect bites. You cannot get HIV/AIDS through any activity that does not include the exchange of certain body fluids. The only way you can get HIV/AIDS from an infected person is by engaging in an activity that allows his or her infected body fluids (semen, vaginal fluid or blood) to enter into your body. This can only happen through unprotected sex, blood transfusion or sharing needles or other **equipment contaminated with infected blood.**



**MYTH:** You can get HIV from a mosquito.

**TRUTH:** Although the HI-virus may be present in the blood in the mosquito's stomach to infect a person, it would need to migrate from the stomach to the salivary glands, so that it could be injected into the next person the mosquito feeds on. (This is the method used by the Malaria parasite.) The HI-virus does not have this ability to move out of the stomach area, so there is very little chance of you contracting it.



**MYTH:** You can't get HIV if you're on the pill.

**TRUTH:** Birth control pills protect you from pregnancy because they interfere with your

hormones, and in that way prevent ovulation. They provide no protection against HIV infection. You need a physical barrier that will prevent the virus in your partner's sexual fluids from entering your body. The most effective barrier at this stage is not to have sex at all, or to use a condom. Unless you are certain that both you and your partner are not infected, then use a condom every time to prevent the possibility of infection.



**MYTH:** Only people who sleep around or use drugs get AIDS.

**TRUTH:** While it is true that an IV drug user (where the virus is transmitted through the sharing of needles), or someone with multiple partners may have a greater chance of being exposed to the virus, not falling into one of these categories does not necessarily mean you're safe. HIV can infect anyone. It doesn't matter if it is the first or fiftieth time you have sex; if you have unsafe

sex with *one* person, or share a needle with *one* person and they are infected with HIV, you could become infected.



**MYTH:** You would be able to tell if your sexual partner is HIV positive.

**TRUTH:** A person who is infected with HIV may have no symptoms for years and continue to look perfectly healthy. Without any outward signs, how would you know?

For that matter, how would *they* know if they have not been tested?

It is important to remember that a newly infected person is more infectious than one who has been infected for a few years because it takes the immune system a while to take control of the virus. During this time the virus has ample opportunity to multiply, resulting in a very high viral load.



**MYTH:** If you have sex with a girl while she is menstruating, you will not get AIDS.

**TRUTH:** If the girl is HIV+, you are not only exposed to her infected vaginal fluids, but

also to copious amounts of her infected blood. So you are, in fact, at much higher risk of getting infected.

If she is not infected, but you are, she is at much greater risk if she has sex with you during menstruation. During menstruation, the uterus sheds excessive tissue, leaving the blood vessels in the uterine walls exposed.

This gives the virus direct access into her body and significantly increases her chances of getting infected.



**MYTH:** You can cure AIDS by sleeping with a virgin.

**TRUTH:** There is no cure for AIDS. This highly dangerous myth has resulted in the abuse of children and even baby-rape. It is essential that this idea be stamped out.

**MYTH:** If you have had no symptoms for three years, you cannot possibly be infected with HIV/AIDS

**TRUTH:** The HI-virus can be present in a person's system for up to seven years or longer without any outward signs of the disease showing.



**MYTH:** If you've been sexually abstinent for 2 years you haven't got HIV/AIDS.

**TRUTH:** You may have contracted HIV many years before your abstinence period. Just because none of the symptoms are manifesting themselves outwardly, it does not mean you haven't got HIV. The only way to know for sure is to get tested.

**MYTH:** You can get HIV/AIDS from sharing meal or eating utensils with an infected person.



**TRUTH:** HIV/AIDS can only be transmitted through direct blood-to-blood contact or through the sharing of body fluids. You cannot get it from sharing utensils with an infected person. Even in family members where there is ongoing close contact, there have been no reported cases of non-sexual transmission.



Free national AIDS HELPLINE - 0800 012 322