



UNDERSTANDING HIV

What is HIV?

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is the virus that causes AIDS. HIV kills CD4 or T-helper cells in your body that fight off infection and disease.

What is AIDS?

AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) is a disease you get when HIV destroys your body's immune system. Normally, your immune system helps you fight off illness. When your immune system fails, you can become very sick and can die.

How Is HIV Spread?

Anyone, regardless of race, sexual preference, gender, or socioeconomic background can contract HIV. This virus may be passed from one person to another when infected blood, semen, or vaginal secretions come in contact with an uninfected person's broken skin or mucous membranes such as areas in the mouth, eyes, nose, vagina, rectum and opening of the penis. An infected pregnant woman can also pass HIV to her baby during pregnancy or delivery, as well as through breast-feeding.

Protecting Yourself

- Abstain from sex or delay first sex.
- Condomise, which means using male or female condoms consistently and correctly.
- Limit the number of sexual partners you have. The more partners you have, the greater the risk of contracting HIV or another sexually transmitted disease.
- Don't share needles and syringes used to inject drugs, steroids, vitamins, or for tattooing or body piercing.
- Don't share razors or toothbrushes because of the possibility of contact with blood.

Common Misconceptions about HIV

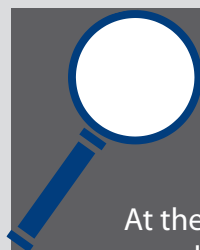
You cannot contract HIV by:

- By working with or being around someone who has HIV.
- From sweat, spit, tears, clothes, drinking fountains, phones, toilet seats, or through everyday things like sharing a meal.
- From insect bites or stings.
- From donating blood.
- From a closed-mouth kiss (but there is a very small chance of getting it from open-mouthed or "French" kissing with an infected person because of possible blood contact).

Getting Tested

Just because you feel healthy doesn't mean you don't have HIV. Getting tested is the only way you will know if you are infected. Make an appointment with your doctor or local health department to get tested. You can even purchase a home collection kit to test for HIV antibodies. To find out where to go in your area for HIV counseling and testing, call the South Carolina AIDS/STD Hotline toll free at 1(800) 322-AIDS (2437).

Source: Centers for Disease Control



Did you Know?

At the end of 2005 in South Carolina, 6384 people were living with the HIV infection (not AIDS) and 6483 were living with AIDS.

Source: Centers for Disease Control

About 900 people in South Carolina are diagnosed with HIV each year.

Source: South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control