

HIV/AIDS

What is HIV?

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is a virus that attacks the body's immune system. HIV weakens the immune system by targeting white blood cells, helper T-cells. Immune system is important for maintaining resistance to infectious diseases and certain types of cancer.

What is AIDS?

AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) is a disease that occurs at the advanced stage of HIV infection.

How does the HIV spread?

HIV infection most commonly occurs through sexual intercourse with an infected person who has not been successfully treated, and through exposure to infected blood products, especially through the sharing of infected needles or syringes when injecting illegal drugs. Transmission from an infected mother to her child during pregnancy, during childbirth, or after birth through breastfeeding is also possible. Infection through saliva, sweat, tears, or the bite of an infected mosquito is not known.

How can I prevent HIV infection?

You can prevent infection by practising safe sex, which means having sexual intercourse with only one faithful partner who is not infected. The risk can be greatly reduced by using condoms correctly during every sexual intercourse. In the event of unprotected sexual intercourse with an HIV-infected person who has not been successfully treated, protection with medication is possible within 72 hours of exposure. Pre-exposure prophylaxis is an additional prevention option. This is when an uninfected person receives protective medication that is also used for treatment. When injecting illegal drugs, individual needles must be used, and when tattooing, piercing, or performing acupuncture, instruments must always be properly sterilized.

What kind of a disease is AIDS?

It usually takes several weeks from exposure to infection (risk event) to the appearance of the first symptoms and signs of HIV infection. Acute retroviral syndrome occurs in just over half of those infected during this time. Patients have elevated body temperature, muscle pain, enlarged lymph nodes, headaches, nausea, diarrhoea, sore throat, and may develop reddish rashes and shallow ulcers on the skin, in the mouth, or on the buttocks. Symptoms usually subside within 2–4 weeks, which is followed by a period of several years without any major problems. In untreated individuals, the immune system gradually deteriorates. This leads to increasingly frequent weight loss, prolonged diarrhoea, cognitive impairment, cancer and other infections that would be much milder, or even non-existent, in healthy individuals.

Why is early treatment of HIV infections important?

HIV infection is currently incurable, but early detection and modern treatment can prevent the infection from progressing to serious illness in the long term. Timely lifelong use of appropriate medication enables a good quality of life and an almost normal life expectancy. A successfully treated person cannot infect others.

Am I at risk of becoming infected with HIV?

Everybody who has sexual intercourse with an infected person, who has not been treated, can become infected with HIV. Injecting drug users who share injection equipment can also become infected with HIV. Have an open discussion with your personal physician and inform yourself about the possibility of testing for HIV or other sexually transmitted infections.

How can I know if I am infected with HIV?

You can ask your personal physician to take a blood sample or order a free HIV test for you. Free, confidential and anonymous testing is also available at the Clinic for Infectious Diseases and Febrile Conditions of the University Medical Centre Ljubljana. For additional information, please see their website. HIV tests for home testing can also be bought at the pharmacy.

How does a doctor determine HIV infection?

The doctor can recognize HIV infection based on a clinical symptoms (especially diseases that define AIDS). However, they can only confirm the infection with blood tests. Testing is recommended for anyone who engages in risky behaviour that could lead to HIV infection.

I am pregnant. How can HIV infection affect my unborn child?

All pregnant women are tested for HIV infection. With proper treatment, the possibility of transfer to the child decreases to less than 0.5%.

How common is HIV infection in Slovenia?

HIV infection is not a common disease in Slovenia. We observe a relatively high incidence primarily among men who have sex with men. More information are available in annual and quarterly reports at the following link: [Okužba s HIV v Sloveniji | Nijz](#)

The data and information about HIV infection in Europe are available at the ECDC ([European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control](#)) website.