

10

Is it safe for me to be around someone who has HIV?



The Canadian HIV/AIDS Clearinghouse, a program of the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA), provides information resources on HIV prevention, care and treatment as well as a range of other HIV/AIDS information.

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Funding for this publication was provided by Health Canada.

Yes! It is quite safe to work, study, or play with people who have HIV and AIDS. It is also safe for children to be in day care or attend school with children who have HIV and AIDS.

Everyday contact with adults or children who have HIV/AIDS is safe.

You cannot get HIV through:

- shaking hands, hugging, or kissing
- working or playing side by side
- sharing equipment or toys (even toys that children put in their mouths)
- sharing washrooms
- sharing water fountains, food, dishes, or cutlery
- changing diapers.

HIV infection is only transmitted through semen, blood, vaginal fluids, and breast milk. Other body fluids, like saliva, mucus or vomit, do not transmit HIV.

The three main ways you can get HIV are:

- having unprotected sex with someone who is HIV positive or whose HIV status is not known
- sharing needles with someone who is HIV positive or whose HIV status is not known
- being born to an HIV-positive mother.

Even if HIV-infected fluid touches your skin, it won't cause infection. Your skin is your best protection. To get infected, enough HIV-infected fluid has to get directly into your bloodstream through a fresh sore or cut (which may not be noticeable). In our daily lives, such fluid exchange or "blood-to-blood" contact with others is unusual—even in cases of biting, scratching, accidents or fights.

What are Universal Precautions?

Universal precautions are infection control guidelines designed to protect workers from exposure to diseases spread by blood and other body fluids. These guidelines are meant to keep people safe from infection and discrimination by suggesting that we assume that everyone is infected with a blood-borne disease such as HIV or hepatitis.

If you ever have to clean up *anyone's* blood or *any* other body fluids, wear latex gloves, clean the soiled surface and disinfect with a fresh bleach solution (one part bleach, 9 parts water). Place any soiled materials in a sealed plastic bag and discard in a covered garbage container. Wash your hands afterwards with soap and warm water. Machine-wash any soiled clothes separately in hot soapy water.

Keep in mind that the Canadian Charter of Human Rights prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities; this includes HIV/AIDS. Also, Canadian law recognizes HIV/AIDS as a disability, like any other medical condition.

For more information, contact your local AIDS service organization or health care practitioner.

For more copies of this fact sheet or other documents on HIV/AIDS, contact the Canadian HIV/AIDS Clearinghouse, 400-1565 Carling Avenue, Ottawa, ON K1Z 8R1
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For more information on HIV/AIDS or for local services, contact: