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## Who can get 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.**

These resources are provided primarily to individuals and organizations working in the areas of HIV/AIDS health and education, as well as those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. We do not endorse, recommend or advocate any specific approach to HIV treatment. This material is not intended as a substitute for the advice of a health professional. Decisions about particular medical treatments should always be made in consultation with a qualified medical practitioner knowledgeable about HIV-related illness and the treatment in question. While we update our material regularly, users should be aware that information changes rapidly. Material obtained through the Clearinghouse may not necessarily be the most current information available. The resources could include technical inaccuracies or typographical errors. Changes are periodically added to the information herein: these changes will be incorporated into new editions of the publication. We recommend that you see your health professional for advice on specific questions relating to your health. We urge users to consult a broad range of information and/or contact us at 1-877-999-7740 for more details. Users relying on this information do so entirely at their own risk. The Clearinghouse and CPHA do not accept any responsibility for damage that may result from the use or misuse of this information.

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Anyone who has unprotected sex (especially penetrative sex) or shares needles with someone who is HIV positive or whose HIV status is not known could become infected with HIV. If you think that HIV/AIDS only affects gay men or injection drug users, you are wrong. You are not protected from HIV because you are straight, or young, or a woman, or living in a rural area. You don't get HIV because of who you are, or where you live. It is what you do that puts you at risk for getting infected.

### Heterosexuals:

The proportion of new infections due to heterosexual exposure has increased steadily in the last twenty years, reaching 21% of new infections by 2000. Globally, heterosexual activity accounts for over 70% of HIV infections (see Question 24 "If I'm a straight man, can I get HIV?" and Question 25 "If I am a straight woman, can I get HIV?").

### Women:

In Canada, women accounted for 14% of the HIV infections in 1999 compared to 11% in 1996. Worldwide, 41% of all new HIV infections are in women

### Youth:

Young people in Canada are being infected with HIV at an increased rate. Of the total of positive HIV people, 12,564 (29%) are among youth 15 to 29 years old.

HIV and AIDS are not just big-city problems. Many Canadians move back and forth between the city and smaller communities to get jobs or go to school. HIV infection and AIDS are found in every part of Canada.

Anyone, anywhere who takes part in unprotected sexual activities or shares needles with someone who is HIV positive or whose HIV status is not known can become infected with HIV.

## What are the main ways to get HIV?

There are three main ways to get infected with HIV:

- having unprotected sex with someone who is HIV positive or whose HIV status is not known, especially having vaginal or anal intercourse without a latex or polyurethane condom (see Question 11 “How can I have sex more safely?”)
- sharing needles or other drug equipment with someone who is HIV positive or whose HIV status is not known (see Question 6 “Are there risks of getting HIV if I drink or use drugs?”)
- receiving the virus as a baby—if a pregnant woman has HIV, her baby can get the virus during pregnancy, delivery or breast feeding (see Question 8 “Does HIV get passed to the baby during pregnancy?”)

Remember, behaviours and activities that put you at risk for HIV infection also put you at risk for infection by other viruses. Co-infection rates are increasing in Canada, particularly for HIV and hepatitis C, with approximately 11,200 people infected with both viruses (see Question 29 “Is there a connection between HIV and hepatitis C?”).

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

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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:**