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## How do you get HIV? (or not get HIV?)



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HIV infection is passed only through blood, semen, vaginal fluids, and breast milk. The main risks are having unprotected sex and sharing needles or equipment for injecting drugs (see Question 11 “How can I have sex more safely?” and Question 6 “Are there risks of getting HIV if I drink or use drugs?”).

**You can get infected if you do the following** (with someone who is HIV positive or whose HIV status you do not know):

- have vaginal or anal intercourse without a latex or polyurethane condom (this is very high risk)
- have oral sex without protection during which semen, vaginal fluid or menstrual blood enters open cuts or sores (which can be unnoticeable) in your mouth (lower risk)

**You can also get infected if you share** (with someone who is HIV positive or whose HIV status you do not know):

- needles or any equipment for injecting drugs such as cocaine, heroin or steroids (invisible amounts of blood are transmitted through sharing needles, syringes, water for diluting, cotton filters, and straws or pipes) (this is very high risk)
- unsterilized needles for tattooing, skin piercing (see Question 7 “How do I know if tattooing or piercing will be safe?”) or acupuncture, or used ink for tattooing (lower risk)
- sex toys, razors or toothbrushes (lower risk)

**What are other ways I can get infected?**

- an HIV positive woman can pass the virus to her baby during pregnancy, at birth or through breast feeding (see Question 8 “Does HIV get passed to the baby during pregnancy?”)
- receiving a blood transfusion or blood product in Canada before 1986 (since then, blood screening has made the risk of infection very low).

Remember, behaviours and activities that put you at risk for HIV infection also put you at risk for infection by other viruses. Also, activities that are considered to be low risk for HIV infection can be high risk for other sexually transmitted infections, like hepatitis or herpes.

### **You CANNOT get infected by:**

- casual, everyday contact
- shaking hands, hugging, kissing
- coughs, sneezes
- giving blood
- swimming pools, toilet seats
- sharing eating utensils, water fountains
- mosquitoes, other insects, animals.

You also cannot get infected if you and your partner do not have HIV and you have unprotected sex **only** with each other. Remember, the only way to know for sure that you do not have HIV is to get tested (see Question 22 “Should I get tested for HIV?” and Question 23 “How do I get tested for HIV?”).

***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:**