

Basic facts about HIV and AIDS

HIV is the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. There are two types of HIV: HIV type 1, which is dominant in Europe, the United States, and Central Africa, and HIV type 2, which was discovered in West Africa, where it has largely remained. Both types of the virus cause a chronic infection with progressive damage to the immune system.

HIV is dangerous because over time the virus destroys the immune system and our body cannot fight or recover from many diseases and infections.

A person can be infected with HIV and have no symptoms, and still can transmit the virus to others. Therefore, regular testing is the only way to be sure you do not have HIV!

AIDS is not a separate disease with its own symptoms; it is the terminal or late stage of chronic infection caused by HIV. AIDS may manifest as pneumonia, skin changes, fungal or viral illnesses, or swollen lymph nodes.

AIDS develops when the immune system is weak and the body is exposed to many infections and diseases, which can be fatal.

There is still no vaccine against HIV!

HIV Transmission

HIV can be transmitted through **BLOOD, SEMEN, VAGINAL FLUIDS, and BREAST MILK.**

The virus must enter the bloodstream for a person to become infected.

If you were at risk of HIV infection — get tested!

HIV can be transmitted in the following ways:

- ① If you have vaginal or anal sex without a condom.
- ① By sharing non-sterile equipment (syringes and needles) for injecting drugs.
- ① By receiving semen in the mouth.
- ① Through non-sterile equipment for tattooing and piercing.
- ① Through oral-vaginal contact during menstruation.
- ① Through an untested blood transfusion.
- ① From an infected mother to her child during pregnancy and/or childbirth.

Only testing can determine whether a person is infected with HIV!

Antibodies detected by blood tests do not appear immediately after infection; they usually take about 6 weeks—sometimes longer—to develop. For this reason, it is necessary to wait a certain period before testing.

REMEMBER: A person can transmit HIV even before antibodies develop!

How can I get tested for HIV?

HIV testing is simple and free of charge in Voluntary Confidential Counseling and Testing (VCCT) centers. Across Bosnia and Herzegovina, VCCT centers exist within public health institutions, and there are also mobile teams that conduct testing in the field. You can find the list of centers where anonymous testing is available at www.hivtestiranjebih.com or call **Partnerships in Health** at **033/627-652**.

A test can be HIV-negative (no HIV antibodies found in the tested blood) or HIV-positive (HIV antibodies found in the tested blood).

Symptoms and Treatment

Years may pass before symptoms appear, and during that time an infected person can transmit the virus to others. Each person reacts differently to HIV infection. Possible symptoms include: persistent herpes, fungal infection, severe fatigue, night sweats, fever, noticeable weight loss, persistent diarrhea, red/purple/brown spots on the body or lips.

There is no cure for HIV infection or AIDS. Antiviral treatment improves quality of life and extends the life expectancy of people living with HIV. Treatment is taken every day for life, and people living with HIV must be monitored by a specialist doctor to determine the best course of care.

BE SAFE!

Always have safer (protected) sex, whether you are HIV-positive, HIV-negative, or have not been tested!

ALWAYS USE A CONDOM!

- Using a condom for vaginal sex protects you from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections and prevents unwanted pregnancy.
- Using a condom for anal sex protects you from HIV, hepatitis, and other sexually transmitted infections.
- Using a condom for oral sex protects you from sexually transmitted infections that can be transmitted orally.

USE ADDITIONAL CONTRACEPTION!

- If the condom breaks.
- If you do not use another form of contraception, use "morning after" pills within 72 hours.
- Go for a medical check-up 5 to 7 days after the condom breaks.
- If you cannot always use a condom.
- To prevent unwanted pregnancy.
- Go for regular medical check-ups.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR BODY!

- If you have symptoms or pain, go for a medical examination.
- Do not self-prescribe treatment; consult a doctor to receive appropriate therapy.
- Always complete any therapy prescribed by a doctor; otherwise, the infection may return.



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