

# Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV-AIDS)

HIV is a virus that damages the immune system by infecting CD4 lymphocytes. The affected person is more susceptible to other infections and to some types of cancer. There are two types of HIV: 1 and 2.

## How is it transmitted?

**HIV is transmitted through unprotected sexual intercourse** (genital, anal, or oral) or intravenous drug use, i.e., contact with infected body fluids such as blood, vaginal secretions, or semen. It is important to note that there is also a risk associated with piercings or tattoos if they are performed without adequate hygienic measures. This risk also exists in cases of breastfeeding.

## How is it not transmitted?

HIV is not transmitted in typical daily living situations, such as the workplace or school, or through pets or insect bites. It is important to note that this condition is not transmitted through contact with uninjured skin, by sweat, tears, or saliva. It is also not transmitted through coughing or sneezing.

## How do I know if I am infected or not?

- **Rapid HIV test:** using a blood sample from the finger. The result can be known in about 20 minutes. If positive, a venous blood test is necessary for confirmation.
- **Venous blood test:** the virus can be detected usually from the third week of infection. If the result is positive, it is necessary to repeat the test to confirm it. If the result is negative, the test should be repeated after 3-6 months, depending on the individual's risk level. The test can be requested in a confidential, voluntary, and free-of-charge manner by your physician or family doctor.

## What symptoms does it produce?

At the time of infection, HIV often goes unnoticed and is only identified in a blood test. However, some patients may experience flu-like symptoms, rashes, or fatigue.

Patients with advanced or untreated HIV may be more susceptible to acquiring other viral, bacterial, and fungal infections, which can also be more aggressive.

## Does HIV cause any other problems?

Chronic HIV infection, even when adequately treated, has been shown to increase the risk of developing other diseases, such as cardiovascular disease and osteoporosis.

## What is the treatment?

The treatment involves the continuous use of antiretroviral medications. It is essential to maintain consistency in the treatment to prevent the development of resistance. It is imperative to initiate this process promptly to ensure the maintenance of adequate defenses and to maintain the virus at a minimum level (undetectable viral load). **An undetectable viral load prevents sexual transmission of the virus.** It is recommended that individuals adopt a healthy lifestyle, avoiding smoking and other toxic substances, and maintaining optimal cholesterol and blood sugar levels, as well as blood pressure.

## How can it be prevented?

The **proper use of condoms** is an effective method of preventing the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. **PrEP, or pre-exposure prophylaxis**, involves the ingestion of medication prior to engaging in high-risk sexual relations. **PEP, or post-exposure prophylaxis**, involves the ingestion of medication during the 72-hour period following a high-risk exposure to HIV.

It is imperative that individuals who use drugs utilize sterile equipment and refrain from sharing drug preparation and administration utensils.

