

Mayo Clinic - Transmission and risk factors of HIV/AIDS

To become infected with HIV, infected blood, semen or vaginal secretions must enter your body. You can't become infected through ordinary contact - hugging, kissing, dancing or shaking hands - with someone who has HIV or AIDS. HIV can't be transmitted through the air, water or via insect bites.

The type of HIV found in many African nations is more easily spread through heterosexual sex. Anyone of any age, race, sex or sexual orientation can be infected.

Transmission

You can become infected with HIV in several ways, including:

- During sex. You may become infected if you have vaginal, anal or oral sex with an infected partner whose blood, semen or vaginal secretions enter your body. The virus can enter your body through mouth sores or small tears that sometimes develop in the rectum or vagina during sexual activity.
- Blood transfusions. In some cases, the virus may be transmitted through blood transfusions. American hospitals and blood banks now screen the blood supply for HIV antibodies, so this risk is very small.
- Sharing needles. HIV can be transmitted through needles and syringes contaminated with infected blood. Sharing intravenous drug paraphernalia puts you at high risk of HIV and other infectious diseases such as hepatitis.
- From mother to child. Infected mothers can infect their babies during pregnancy or delivery, or through breast-feeding. But if women receive treatment for HIV infection during pregnancy, the risk to their babies is significantly reduced.

Risk factors

Anyone of any age, race, sex or sexual orientation can be infected, but you're at greatest risk of HIV/AIDS if you:

- Have unprotected sex. Unprotected sex means having sex without using a new latex or polyurethane condom every time. Anal sex is more risky than is vaginal sex. The risk increases if you have multiple sexual partners.
- Have another STD. Many sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) produce open sores on your genitals. These sores act as doorways for HIV to enter your body.
- Use intravenous drugs. People who use intravenous drugs often share needles and syringes. This exposes them to droplets of other people's blood.
- Are an uncircumcised man. Studies indicate that lack of circumcision increases the risk for heterosexual transmission of HIV.