

What is HIV?

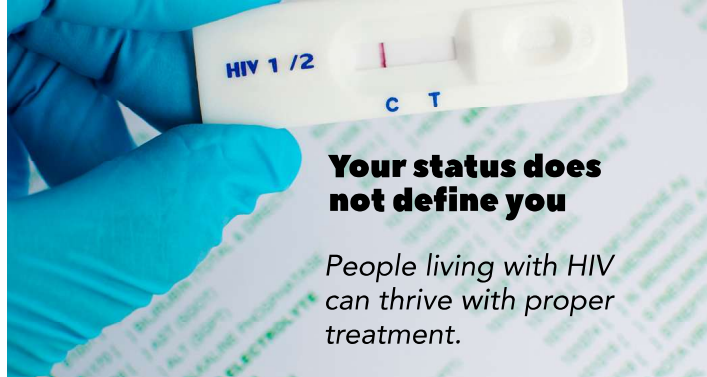
HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a virus that attacks the body's immune system. Without treatment, HIV can lead to AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). Today, with proper treatment, people living with HIV can live long, healthy lives, have healthy children, and cannot sexually transmit HIV if they maintain an undetectable viral load (Undetectable=Untransmittable).

How HIV spreads

- HIV is spread through sexual contact – vaginal, anal, or, rarely, oral sex – with someone who has HIV and is not using protection.
- Sharing needles or injection equipment can transmit HIV.
- Without proper treatment, HIV can also spread from a parent to a baby during pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding.
- HIV does not spread through casual contact, hugging, kissing, sharing dishes or drinks, or using the same toilet.

Symptoms

- Many people have no symptoms for years after infection.
- Possible early symptoms (2–4 weeks after exposure) include fever, sore throat, fatigue, rash, and swollen lymph nodes (similar to the flu).
- Later symptoms, if untreated, can include rapid weight loss, persistent diarrhea, chronic fatigue, mouth sores, and other infections.



Your status does not define you

People living with HIV can thrive with proper treatment.

Get tested

- The only way to know your HIV status is through testing.
- Modern HIV tests are fast, reliable, and widely available.
- Early diagnosis and treatment helps people stay healthy and prevent HIV transmission to others.
- Regular screening is recommended, especially for sexually active people under age 25 or anyone with new or multiple partners.

Pregnancy & HIV Resources

- **Healthy Beginnings** – CCDPH maternal and child health program
cookcountyhealthybeginnings.org
- **Every Mother Every Child** – CCDPH resource website
everymothereverychild.org

Get Free Testing & Condoms

Find testing sites in Cook County



Request free condoms



ABOUT HIV



Cook County DEPT. of
Public Health

A division of Cook County Health

**BUILDING
HEALTHIER
COMMUNITIES**

Get treated

- Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) is the standard treatment for HIV. ART lowers the amount of virus in your body (viral load) to undetectable levels, keeping your immune system strong.
- Undetectable=Untransmittable (U=U): People with HIV who maintain an undetectable viral load cannot pass HIV to sexual partners.
- Treatment is lifelong, but allows people to live normal, healthy lives.

Pregnancy and HIV

- Pregnant individuals living with HIV can take ART during pregnancy to reduce the chance of passing HIV to their babies to less than 1%.
- Safe delivery practices and medication for the baby further protect against transmission.
- HIV can also be transmitted during breastfeeding without proper treatment.

Medical care and case management

- Medical care and case management services are available to people living with HIV in Illinois regardless of medical insurance status.
- These services help connect individuals to treatment, support programs, and other essential resources like food banks, housing assistance, transportation, financial support etc.



Follow-up for reportable STIs

Most STIs, including HIV, are reportable infections. This means it's likely that health department staff will reach out to you if your test results are positive. They do this to:

- Ensure you've been treated appropriately
- Provide you with complete information
- Collect a brief sexual history and possible exposure timeline
- Help stop the spread of infection in the community

Your personal information is protected under HIPAA regulations, and everything you share is completely confidential.

Having an STI does not define you. Getting tested and treated is a normal part of taking care of your health.

People with HIV who take treatment as prescribed can live long, healthy lives.

Knowing your status, starting treatment early, and practicing prevention are the best ways to stop HIV.

Protect yourself and others

Condoms

- Use condoms or dental dams during vaginal, anal, and oral sex.

PrEP

- PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis): A daily pill or long-acting injection for HIV-negative individuals that reduces the risk of HIV by up to 99%.

PEP

- PEP (Post-Exposure Prophylaxis): Emergency medication started within 72 hours after potential exposure, to prevent HIV infection.

Doxy PEP

- Doxy PEP is a preventive option to reduce the risk of bacterial STIs for some individuals. Discuss with your doctor.

Other prevention tips

- Never share needles or injection equipment to avoid HIV and other infections that spread through blood.
- Get tested regularly and encourage partners to do the same.
- Talk openly with partners and your doctor about STI and HIV prevention—it's part of healthy communication.