

Myth and Reality of HIV/AIDS

MYTH: HIV or AIDS can be cured.

REALITY: To date, there is no cure for HIV or AIDS and there are no vaccines to prevent HIV infection.

MYTH: HIV/AIDS is a gay disease.

REALITY: Anyone is susceptible to HIV/AIDS, regardless of their sexual orientation. Everyone is potentially at risk of getting HIV if they share needles or practice unsafe sex. Worldwide, HIV is spread most often through heterosexual contact.

MYTH: You can get HIV from breathing the air around an HIV-infected person or from hugging or holding hands with an HIV-infected person.

REALITY: HIV cannot be transmitted through:

- toilet seats or door-knob handles
- touching, hugging, holding hands, or cheek kissing with an HIV-infected person.
- sharing eating utensils with an HIV-infected person.
- mosquito bites.

HIV is transmitted through contact with an HIV-positive person's infected body fluids, such as semen, pre-ejaculate fluid, vaginal fluids, blood, or breast milk. HIV can also be transmitted through needles used for injecting drugs, tattooing or body piercing.

MYTH: I can get HIV by sharing exercise equipment or playing sports with an HIV-positive person.

REALITY: Contact with sweat or tears have never been shown to result in transmission of HIV.

MYTH: You can get HIV by kissing an HIV-infected person.

REALITY: Casual contact through closed-mouth or "social" kissing is not a risk for transmission of HIV. There is a theoretical potential for contact with blood during "French" kissing or open-mouthed kissing, but no cases have been attributed to any kind of kissing.

MYTH: You cannot get HIV if you are using birth control methods like diaphragms, cervical caps, sponges, spermicides, DepoProvera, Norplant, or the Pill.

REALITY: These birth control methods do not prevent the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases (STD) such as HIV. They only aim to prevent pregnancy. The surest way to prevent both pregnancy and STD infections is through abstinence. One way people who are sexually active may prevent pregnancy and STD infection is to use a condom in combination with another form of birth control, such as a diaphragm, cervical cap, sponge, spermicide, DepoProvera, Norplant, or the Pill. Birth control products containing the

spermicide nonoxynol-9 (found in most contraceptive creams, gels, suppositories, foams, films and sponges) help to prevent pregnancy but may increase the risk of HIV.

MYTH: I can't have more than one sexually transmitted disease (STD) at a time.

REALITY: A person can be infected with more than one STD. A person with an untreated STD may also be 6-10 times more likely to pass on or acquire HIV during sex. Risk for infection increases 10 to 300-fold in the presence of a genital ulcer, such as occurs in syphilis or genital herpes.

MYTH: There is so such thing as safer sex.

REALITY: Safer sex is sexual activity without penetration, or sex with a latex condom or a latex barrier (in the case of oral sex). Although safer sex can substantially reduce the sexual transmission of an STD like HIV, sexual abstinence is the surest way to prevent the sexual transmission of an STD, including HIV.

MYTH: Since I only have oral sex, I'm not at risk for HIV/AIDS.

REALITY: While oral sex is of lower risk than other forms of sex, you can get HIV by having oral sex with a man or a woman. It is important to use a latex barrier during oral, vaginal, or anal sex.

MYTH: I would know if a loved one or I had HIV.

REALITY: A person with HIV may not show any symptoms for many years. Since HIV affects each person differently, many people with HIV can look and feel healthy for years. The only sure way to know is to get tested.

MYTH: Getting tested for HIV is pointless.

REALITY: Knowing if you are HIV-positive will allow you to seek early treatment that can help you stay healthy longer and enable you not to pass on the virus to someone else. Regardless of your HIV status, you can learn how to prevent future infection from HIV or other STDs through counseling offered at many HIV testing centers.

MYTH: When you're on HIV therapy you can't transmit the virus to anyone else.

REALITY: Antiretroviral drugs don't keep you from passing the virus to others. Therapy can keep the viral load down to undetectable levels, but HIV is still present in the body and can still be transmitted to others.

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