

# *Patients' Guide to* HIV/AIDS

## *What is HIV?*

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. When someone acquires HIV, the virus weakens and damages the body's immune system such that it is unable to fight off infections.

## *What is AIDS?*

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is the name used to describe a state in which the immune system is so weak that it can no longer fight life-threatening infections and illnesses.

## *How is HIV passed?*

- Unprotected sexual intercourse with an infected person (anal, vaginal, oral)
- Sharing infected syringes and needles
- Mother-to-child transmission during pregnancy, birth, or breastfeeding
- Transfusion with contaminated blood and blood products (**NOTE:** all blood donation equipment used in Singapore is sterile and not re-used)

HIV **cannot** be spread through casual contact, e.g. hugging, kissing, holding hands, sharing utensils and food, toothbrushes, swimming in the same pool, etc. One also **cannot** acquire HIV through animals or insects, including mosquitoes.

## *What are the signs and symptoms?*

Most people with HIV do not show any signs or symptoms.

Should one experience symptoms, they may go through the following in the respective stages.

### **Primary HIV Infection**

- Occurs soon after acquiring HIV
- Flu-like illness with swollen lymph nodes, fever, discomfort, & rash lasting ~2-3 weeks

### **Asymptomatic Stage**

No signs or symptoms; can last for many years

## **Persistent Generalised Lymphadenopathy**

Unexplained lymph node enlargement in the neck, underarms, and groin for > 3 months

## **AIDS & Related Conditions**

This is the advanced stage of the virus. It takes an average of 8-10 years from the time of exposure for an untreated person to show the first signs of AIDS. Symptoms like fever, unexplained weight loss and diarrhoea are common. Rare cancers and infections may develop, and common infections may be severe.

All people infected with HIV are able to spread the infection to others through unsafe high-risk activities.

## *How is HIV diagnosed?*

The DSC clinic routinely screens HIV for all patients attending the clinic. **If one wishes to opt out of the test, do inform us.**

The window period between the point of HIV infection and the time an HIV blood test detects the infection is within 1-3 months. If the blood test is done during the window period, the result is not as reliable. Re-testing is still advised at 3 months even if your initial test was negative.

At DSC Clinic, there are 2 ways to get tested:

- HIV Antibody Blood Test – blood sample is taken from the arm. Results usually take 3-5 working days.
- HIV Rapid Test – sample is taken from finger prick or oral swab. Results usually take an hour.

If the screening is reactive, a confirmatory test will be carried out. Results take approximately 14 days. While awaiting the result of the confirmatory test, patients are encouraged to abstain from sex to avoid the possibility of passing the infection to others.

**NOTE:** A positive test result does not mean that the person has AIDS, which is the end-stage of the HIV infection. AIDS is diagnosed when certain types of life-threatening infections and cancers develop in an HIV-infected person.

## *Who should get tested?*

One should consider getting tested every 6 to 12 months if they have ever engaged in the following high-risk activities:

- Unprotected vaginal or anal sex with multiple partners, casual partners, sex workers, or known HIV-infected people.
- Sharing of needles when injecting drugs.

One is also encouraged to get tested for HIV if one has been diagnosed with another STI, especially syphilis.

HIV testing at the DSC Clinic is private and confidential, but not anonymous. If one requires an anonymous test, one may contact a registered anonymous testing clinic from the list of such clinics which can be found on the HealthHub website (scan the QR code beside).



## *Can HIV cause other problems?*

HIV infection weakens the body's immune system so it is easier for an HIV-infected person to get infections or cancers that rarely occur in healthy people.

## *How can HIV affect pregnancy?*

During pregnancy, HIV can pass through the placenta and infect the fetus. During labour and delivery, the baby may be exposed to the virus in the mother's blood and other fluids.

HIV infection of an infant born to an HIV infected mother can be almost completely prevented if the pregnant takes medication during her pregnancy.

## *Important Notes on HIV*

- Individuals infected with HIV are required by law to disclose their HIV status to their partner(s) before engaging in sexual activity. They are also encouraged to get their partner(s) and others who may be exposed, e.g. children of HIV-positive mothers, to get tested.

- However, we understand that may take some time to adjust to living with HIV. Our DSC Clinic staff can support you to tell partner(s) about your diagnosis.
- Individuals infected with HIV will be referred to the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID), the national referral centre for HIV/AIDS, for further management. They may also have their condition managed at another hospital-based HIV clinic of their choice.

<b>Status of infected person</b>	<b>Notification made to</b>	<b>Action taken</b>
Married	Spouse	National Public Health Unit will inform the spouse if the infected person does not do so within the given timeframe
Non-Singaporean and married to Singaporean/PR	Immigration & Checkpoint Authority	Person will be granted renewable short-/long-term social visit pass
Non-Singaporean and not married to Singaporean/PR	Immigration & Checkpoint Authority	Person will be asked to leave Singapore and denied from further entry
Non-Singaporean and working in Singapore	Immigration & Checkpoint Authority and Ministry of Manpower*	Employment pass and work permit withdrawn. A short extension may be granted in exceptional cases.

*\* Notification of positive HIV results to the Ministry of Manpower is for statistical purposes. This process is confidential.*

## Reach Out to Us

If you still have queries, feel free to call us at the following numbers:

**HIV/STI Hotline (8am – 5pm)**

1800 252 1324

**Health Info Recorded Hotline (24 hours)**

+65 6295 2944

**Appointments**

+65 6293 9648

You may also visit [www.dsc-clinic.sg](http://www.dsc-clinic.sg) for more information, or find us at the DSC Clinic, 31 Kelantan Lane #01-16 S(200031).

## Disclaimer

We have attempted to provide full, accurate, and up-to-date information in this patient information leaflet, based on current medical evidence and opinion. However, information and advice may vary from different sources and over time. If you have any further questions, do see your doctor or healthcare provider.

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