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Health e-Tools

HIV/AIDS - Myth versus Reality

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 can be susceptible to HIV/AIDS, regardless of their sexual orientation. Everyone is at risk of getting HIV from blood-to-blood contact, sharing needles or 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 contaminated with HIV-infected blood, including 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 has 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. Because of the theoretical potential for contact with blood during "French" or open-mouthed kissing, the CDC recommends against engaging in this activity with an infected person. However, no cases of AIDS 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 an STD 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 no 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: You can get HIV by having oral sex with a man or a woman. That is why 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 up to 10 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 further infection from HIV and 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.

For more, please visit the MedicineNet.com [Human Immunodeficiency Virus Center](http://www.medicinenet.com/human-immunodeficiency-virus-center/).

[Source: American Association of World Health](http://www.aawhworldhealth.org/)

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