

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN TO CHANGE **HIV**STORY

What is HIV?

Your body's immune system protects you from illness. Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) causes an infection that damages the immune system. HIV can't be cured, but it can be treated. If left untreated, HIV can lead to Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Many HIV-positive people who get good medical care live for a long time and never develop AIDS.

How do you get HIV?

HIV passes from one person to another through bodily fluids. The most common ways this happens is having sex without a condom, sharing needles or during labour and delivery. To prevent getting HIV always use a condom when you have sex and never share needles.

How do I know if I have HIV?

Some people feel like they have a bad flu soon after being infected with HIV. Other people don't have any symptoms for years. 1 in 4 people with HIV don't even know they have the virus. The only way to know for sure is to get tested for HIV.

Why should I get tested?

The sooner you know you have HIV, the sooner your doctor can get you the right medical care. There is no cure for HIV, but if you have HIV, treatment can help you live a better, longer life.

How does an HIV test work?

A standard test uses a blood sample taken from your arm, and results take 1 to 2 weeks. A point-of-care test uses a drop of blood taken from your finger. If you don't have HIV, a point-of-care test can tell you right away. If HIV antibodies are found, you'll need a standard blood test to make sure the results are right.

What if my HIV test is negative?

A negative test result means that no HIV antibodies have been found in your blood. If it's been more than 3 months since you could have been infected (during sex or needle-sharing, for example), a negative result means you probably don't have HIV. If it has been less than 3 months since you may have been exposed you may still have the virus, but the test cannot detect the antibodies to HIV. You will need to have a second test after the 3 months have passed to be sure or talk to your doctor about acute HIV testing.

What if my HIV test is positive?

If your HIV test is positive, it means that you have HIV. Your healthcare provider will talk to you about what medical treatment you need. If you take care of yourself and get the right medical treatment at the right time, you can live a long life with HIV.

Do I tell people I have HIV?

If you have HIV, it's important to tell anyone you could have shared the virus with, including people you've had sex with or shared needles with. If they have HIV, they need medical care. If you can't talk to those people for any reason then your local public health nurse can talk to them without using your name.

Who will know my test results?

HIV test results are kept by the provincial laboratory system and become part of your BC health record. Only healthcare providers who give you medical treatment can see your record, and they'll only see the information about you that they need to do their jobs.

What if I think I've been infected?

If you think you might have been exposed to HIV in the past 3 days (during sex or needle-sharing, for example), go to an emergency room immediately for advice and testing. There are medications that can stop an HIV infection, but only if it's caught quickly.