

HIV & AIDS Awareness for Native Youth



What is it?¹

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a sexually transmitted infection often discussed in conjunction with Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). AIDS is a more advanced stage of HIV and can develop if HIV is left untreated. HIV attacks the cells in the body's immune system and makes it difficult to fight off infections. While there is no cure for HIV, many individuals with HIV live long, healthy lives with treatment.

Who can get it?

HIV can infect anyone, not just specific populations as was once believed.^{1,2} It is spread through vaginal, oral, and anal sex; by sharing needles or syringes; and from an HIV positive mother to her child in pregnancy, birth, and/or breastfeeding.¹ HIV is not transmitted through casual touching (kissing, hugging, shaking hands), surface contact (towels, toilets, doorknobs), or through the air (coughs/sneezes).²

How do I know if I have it?

The **only way** to know if you are HIV positive is to **get tested**.^{1,2} According to Healthy Native Youth, 1 in 5 people with HIV don't know they're infected because there are often no symptoms, so the virus is easily and unknowingly spread. Even if you don't feel sick and have no indication of HIV, it can still be spread, so getting tested is extremely important.

Protection & Prevention:^{1,2}

You can protect yourself and your partner(s) by:

- using condoms every time you have vaginal or anal sex
- using condoms or dental dams for oral sex
- washing hands thoroughly with soap and warm water after fingering, hand jobs, or other intimate touching
- avoiding drugs or alcohol before sex as it's easier to make smart, healthy decisions
- having sex with only one partner who is either only having sex with you or is communicative about their other sexual partners
- getting tested consistently

Myths:¹

There are many ways to protect yourself and your partner(s), but there are also some common misconceptions regarding what prevents the spread of HIV. Practices that DO NOT protect against HIV include:

- pulling out before ejaculation
- birth control
- washing genitals, peeing, or douching after unprotected sex

Resources

What do I do if I have a positive test result? ¹

- Tell all sexual partners as soon as possible
- Make an appointment with a doctor, preferably one with experience treating HIV, for treatment
- Lean on your support system of family, friends, or community members

Telling your sexual partner(s) may be an uncomfortable conversation, but it is important for your health and theirs. For helpful tips and support, see the resources below. A positive HIV diagnosis can be scary, and you may feel an array of emotions. Remember that, when caught early, HIV is easily managed and controlled, and you can still live a long and healthy life.

If you test positive for HIV or AIDS, you are not alone. There are many resources available to help you and your partner(s). Together, we can keep Native communities safe from STIs.

- **Native Youth Sexual Health Network**: The NYSHN is an organization by and for Indigenous youth that provides resources and information on issues regarding sexual/reproductive health, rights, and justice.
- **We R Native**: We R Native is a multimedia health resource for Native youth. It includes an interactive website, texting service, Relatives Q&A service, and other helpful media.
- **iknowmine**: IKnowMine distributes educational resources and materials as well as harm reduction kits and HIV self-testing kits, among other prevention tools. (Downloadable resources available to anyone, physical kits and materials to Alaska residents.)
- **CDC: Get Yourself Tested & STD Awareness**: This resource bank provides toolkits and informational materials about who should get tested, how to get tested, and how to prevent STIs/STDs.
- **Planned Parenthood**: PP offers information on reproductive and sexual health, as well as many clinical health services and live chats with experts on their website.
- **Loveisrespect.org**: LIR provides a 24/7 confidential helpline, texting service, and website to offer support and information on dating violence and healthy relationships.



References

1. We R Native. (n.d.). *99 Fact Sheets Plus Resources: HIV & AIDS*. Healthy Native Youth. https://www.healthynativeyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/13050080_99_Fact-Sheets-Plus-Resources.pdf
2. National Aboriginal Health Organization. (2011, March). *First Nations Sexual Health Toolkit*. Native Youth Sexual Health Network. <https://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/first-nations-sexual-health-toolkit>



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