



HIV ➤ Living with HIV/AIDS

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“My husband and I are both HIV positive. He found out first and then I had the test. We were both shocked – we’d never thought we were at risk. I was really angry with him at first. But then I thought that maybe I gave the virus to him. We’ll never know and now it doesn’t matter. What matters is that we stay healthy and enjoy life. Our local AIDS Council helped us find support services and we found a doctor we trust. We learn every day to live with HIV.”

5.1 What do I need to do at home?

You may be worried that you can pass on HIV to the people you live with, especially children. However, they are not at risk of infection just because you live together.

HIV is not transmitted through casual contact between people sharing a home. Kissing, hugging, playing, eating, sharing a bed or household items such as plates, cups and cutlery will **not** transmit HIV.

Your health is important. If you have HIV, your immune system is not working well, and you are at risk of catching infections from the people around you. This can have serious consequences for your health.

To prevent the spread of infections, these precautions are recommended as part of household routine:

- Everyone in the house should wash their hands after using the toilet and before handling food.
- Always wear gloves when cleaning up blood and other body fluids. Clean the area with a paper towel, followed by soapy water. Disinfect with bleach, according to the instructions on the bottle, and dry the area with a clean paper towel.
- Bed linen, towels and clothing with blood or body fluids on them, should be washed separately.
- Avoid kissing and close contact with people suffering colds or flu and children who have childhood diseases such as chickenpox, mumps or measles.

5.2 Can I have sex?

Having HIV does not mean you cannot have sex. However, you may need to make some changes to your sex life.

There are a number of things to consider:

You need to protect your partner from infection with HIV if he/she is HIV negative by having safe sex.

- Having safe sex means using condoms, dams and water-based lubricant every time you have sex. Condoms form a barrier to prevent the HIV in your blood, semen or vaginal fluids from entering your partner’s bloodstream.

- Oral sex is regarded as a very low risk activity for transmitting HIV. However, there may be some risk if your partner has some cuts or sores in the mouth or have had recent dental work. Using condoms and dams is the safest way to have oral sex.
- Effective treatment of HIV (i.e. you have undetectable viral load) can also help reduce your risk of transmitting HIV. Talk to your doctor for more information.
- Kissing, cuddling, mutual masturbation and massage are also safe sex.
- Depending on the state or territory you live in, you may be required by law to tell any sexual partner of your HIV positive status, even if you intend to have safe sex. The AIDS Council in most states or territories will be able to advise you further. For up-to-date information about the law and HIV, contact the HIV/AIDS Legal Centre www.halc.org.au
- Telling someone that you have HIV can be difficult. Talk to your doctor or Social worker (or counsellor or health care professional) for advice.

If you've had unsafe sex with your partner, it is possible he or she may be HIV positive and should consider having a HIV test.

If your partner is also HIV positive, you may agree not to practise safe sex. However, it is uncertain whether infection with another strain of HIV causes harm. You may wish to discuss this with your doctor, but the final decision will be one you and your partner make together.

Remember, sex involves both you and your partner, and you are both responsible for safe sex.

"I was in a fog when I found out. I felt like my whole life had just been taken away. The doctor wasn't much help – she just said I would have to be careful and not spread HIV around. I didn't even think about sex for about 2 years. It was like that part of my life was gone forever. Then I met someone and we got close without even realising it. I told him I'm HIV positive before we had sex. He was pretty shocked but he listened. Now we have safe sex. And it's great sex!"

5.3 Can I have a baby?

Regardless of your HIV status, you may want to have children. In Australia, people living with HIV can have healthy babies.

If you are planning to have a baby or if you have found out that you are pregnant, talk to your HIV doctor as soon as possible – he/she can explain everything you need to know about pregnancy and HIV.

By getting good medical care, you will give yourself the best chance of having a healthy baby. In Australia it is **very rare** for a woman under HIV treatment to pass on the virus to her baby.

A HIV positive mother can reduce the risk of transmission to her baby by:

- Taking HIV treatments during pregnancy
- Having a caesarean delivery rather than a vaginal birth
- Not breastfeeding
- Giving the baby anti-retroviral treatment for six weeks after birth.

You may find it helpful to talk to other people living with HIV who have children. Your HIV specialist or the AIDS Council in most states or territories should be able to put you in contact with other HIV positive parents.

"We talked about having the baby for a long time. It was one of the biggest decisions we have ever made together. When we first found out we were HIV positive, we never thought we could have a child. The idea came slowly and when we asked our doctor, he was supportive. We talked to a lot of people and found out that other HIV positive people have had healthy babies."

5.4 What if I inject drugs?

If you inject drugs, always use your own or new needles, syringes and other injecting equipment. Don't share any injecting equipment. This will protect you and others from infections such as HIV, hepatitis B and Hepatitis C.

Plan ahead and make sure you have extra needles and syringes available if you need them.

In Australia, people who inject drugs can get free needles, syringes and other injecting equipment. This doesn't mean injecting drugs is legal.

Free equipment is available from Needle and Syringe Programs (NSP) and some chemists. NSPs are services for people who use drugs. They also provide information and help if you want to stop using drugs. Needle vending machines can be found at various locations and are open 24 hours a day. For information on your nearest NSP or vending machine in NSW, call ADIS (Alcohol and Drug Information Service) on 1-800-422-599 any time.



When you inject, use a swab to stop any bleeding and wash your hands thoroughly afterwards. Do not stop any bleeding by using your fingers or thumbs.



Always dispose of your injecting equipment safely. The best place to do this is at an NSP in the yellow sharps disposal container (fit bin). Some chemists and major hospitals will accept used equipment and you can also find sharps disposal containers in some public toilets.

If you can't get to an NSP or find public fit bin, put your used fit in a screw-top container (like an empty drink bottle) before putting it in a rubbish bin.

It's a good idea to tell your doctor if you are using drugs, as drug use can affect both your health and HIV treatments. Your doctor can also recommend specialised services for people who use drugs.

5.5 Can I travel overseas?

Yes, but there are a number of things to consider when planning your trip. This is because you may be exposed to diseases you are not exposed to at home. Taking precautions to avoid these diseases is always important, especially if you are living with HIV.

- Tell your doctor about your travel plans. He/she can help you plan for any medical needs or emergencies you may have.
- Contact an AIDS Council for information about services you may need in the countries you plan to visit.
- If you are taking HIV treatment or any other medication, make sure you have enough to last through your trip. In some countries, HIV treatments are not available or are very expensive. Find out what you should do if you lose or damage your medications.
- Ask your doctor what vaccinations you need. Some vaccines such as yellow fever should not be taken by people living with HIV, whereas others such as vaccines for hepatitis A and B are recommended.
- Be aware that food and water in some countries may not be as clean and safe as they are in Australia and may cause diarrhoea and other illnesses.
- Ensure the country you are visiting allows entry for people living with HIV and allows you to bring in your HIV drugs.

- Pack condoms and/or dams, lubricant as these may not be available or the quality may be poor.

For more information on HIV and travel, visit www.hivrestrictions.org

