

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus)

HIV is a virus that is carried in blood and body fluids and damages the immune system. Untreated infection with HIV can lead to AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome). When a person has AIDS, their immune system can no longer protect their body from other diseases such as infections and cancers. HIV is a lifelong infection.

Effective treatment is now available and people who take it have a near-normal life expectancy.

How it spreads

HIV only spreads through direct contact with infected blood and body fluids, usually through needle puncture, broken skin, or a break in the mucous membranes. In Australia, most HIV infections are caused by:

- unprotected sex with a person not on HIV treatment (people on effective HIV treatment cannot pass on HIV during sex)
- sharing drug-injecting equipment
- spread of the virus from mother to infant during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding
- receiving blood or blood products before screening for HIV was introduced in 1985.

HIV does **not** spread through:

- social contact in schools, at home, or in the workplace
- air or water
- swimming pools or toilets
- sharing of plates, cups or cutlery
- kissing, coughing, sneezing or spitting
- mosquitoes or other biting insects.

Exclusion period

Not excluded – people with HIV can attend the service.

If the person is severely immunocompromised, they will be vulnerable to other people's infections.

Actions for educators and other staff

Maintain confidentiality if a child or staff member has HIV.

Use standard precautions for handling blood and other body fluids at all times – you may not know if people are carrying the virus.

Cover open wounds with a waterproof dressing (like a plastic adhesive strip).

Actions for parents and carers

Talk to your doctor about treatment and precautions for your child to attend a care service.

Children with HIV are more likely to get severe infections than other children, so vaccination is especially important. Ask your doctor about which vaccines your child should get.

You may choose to tell educators or other staff if your child has HIV, but you do not have to.

Keep children with HIV at home when there are outbreaks of infectious diseases at the service.

Cover open wounds with a waterproof dressing (like a plastic adhesive strip).

More information about HIV

See healthdirect for more information on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of HIV (healthdirect.gov.au/hiv-infection-and-aids).

To find out if a child needs medical help:

- use the online symptom checker (healthdirect.gov.au/symptom-checker)
- speak to a registered nurse by calling the 24-hour health advice hotline on 1800 022 222.