



Public Health Services Administration

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What is HIV?

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a virus that attacks the cells that help the body fight infection. HIV makes a person more vulnerable to other infections and diseases. HIV weakens the immune system. Over time, this causes immunosuppression. This is when the body's ability to fight infections or diseases is reduced.

 Click [here](#) to learn more about HIV.

What is Stage 3 HIV (AIDS)?

Without treatment, HIV can lead to Stage 3 HIV, popularly known as AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). No effective cure for Stage 3 HIV (AIDS) exists. Taking HIV medicine as prescribed can prevent people from developing Stage 3 HIV (AIDS).

Stage 3 HIV (AIDS) is the late stage of HIV that occurs when the body's immune system is badly damaged. A person living with HIV is considered to have progressed to Stage 3 HIV (AIDS) when:

- The number of their CD4 cells falls below 200 cells per cubic millimeter of blood, or
- they develop one or more opportunistic infections, regardless of their CD4 count.

Who is made most vulnerable to HIV and where do they live?

People made most vulnerable to HIV include:

- non-Hispanic Black people,
- people assigned male sex at birth,
- cisgender men or boys,
- transgender women or girls,
- people ages 25-34,
- people who inject drugs,
- males with male sexual contact exposure, and

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- people living in Prince George's County.

See the [Maryland HIV County Overview Dashboard](#) for the most recent data by jurisdiction or demographic group, and trends.

How can HIV be transmitted?

HIV is spread by direct contact with blood and certain bodily fluids from a person living with HIV. Common methods of exposure to HIV include:

- sexual contact,
- sharing needles or syringes, or
- when HIV is passed from a birthing person living with HIV to the infant during pregnancy, childbirth, or chest feeding.

You can't get or transmit HIV from casual contact that does not involve bodily fluids. Casual contact includes:

- touching,
- hugging,
- kissing,
- shaking hands,
- sharing toilets, or
- using public facilities.

 Click [here](#) to learn more about how HIV spreads.

What are the symptoms of HIV?

Most people have flu-like symptoms within 2-4 weeks of HIV transmission. Some people have no symptoms at all. The only way to know if you have HIV is to get tested.

 For more information about the symptoms of HIV, click [here](#).

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What are Maryland's HIV screening and testing recommendations?

Maryland recommends screening all people ages 13+ as part of routine medical care. HIV screening includes taking a sexual history, injection drug use history, and HIV testing history. All people ages 13+ should be tested for HIV at least once.

People who are sexually active or have injected drugs since their last negative HIV test should be tested annually.

People who should receive more frequent testing (every 3 to 6 months) include:

- people with more than two sexual partners per year,
- males with male sexual contact,
- people who engage in transactional sex, and
- people with partners living with HIV.



How can I get tested for HIV?

To receive an HIV test:

- ask your health care provider,
- visit your local health department, or
- order an at home test online [here](#).



What HIV treatment is available?

HIV treatment (antiretroviral therapy or ART) involves taking medicine as prescribed by a health care provider. Treatment should be started as soon as possible after diagnosis.

The goal of HIV treatment is to reach viral suppression. Viral suppression means having less than 200 copies of HIV per milliliter of blood.

If a person takes their HIV medicine as prescribed and reaches viral suppression, they can stay healthy and will not transmit HIV to their sex partners.

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 Click [here](#) and enter your ZIP Code to find HIV services located near you.

How can HIV be prevented?

Today, more tools than ever are available to help prevent HIV. Prevention strategies include:

- using condoms,
- never sharing needles, syringes, or other injection equipment,
- using PrEP, or
- using PEP.

What is PrEP?

Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) is medicine taken to prevent getting HIV. PrEP is highly effective and reduces the risk of getting HIV from sex by about 99%.

 Click [here](#) to learn more about PrEP.

What is PEP?

Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) is medicine taken that prevents HIV after a possible exposure. PEP must be started within 72 hours after a recent possible exposure to HIV. PEP can be used after either occupational (PEP) or non-occupational exposures (nPEP).

 Click [here](#) to learn more about PEP.

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