

Myths and Facts

Myth: AIDS can be caught through casual contact. This includes shaking hands, hugging, crying, coughing, sneezing, sharing straws, sharing eating utensils or food, or by contact with insects, animals, toilet seats, or swimming pools.

Fact: AIDS is not transmitted through any type of casual contact. Physical contact that doesn't involve the exchange of body fluids will not transmit the infection.

Myth: AIDS is a gay disease.

Fact: The AIDS virus does not care about sexual orientation. In North America, AIDS has been found mostly in homosexual men, although in Canada at least two per cent of people with AIDS have acquired it through heterosexual sex.

In Africa, 70 per cent of AIDS cases are heterosexual, affecting women and men equally. There is no proof that AIDS will not spread through North America's heterosexual population.

Myth: Women do not have to worry about contracting AIDS.

Fact: Heterosexual transmission of AIDS occurs from man to woman and vice versa. Women can catch AIDS by having sex with an infected partner. Women are at increased risk if their partners are bisexual or IV drug users.

Myth: Lesbians are not at risk.

Fact: Lesbians are the safest sexually active group because the transfer of body fluids is very low. Women who have lesbian sex should avoid menstrual fluid, as it contains the AIDS virus in varying amounts.

Myth: You can catch AIDS from donating blood.

Fact: AIDS is not transmitted by donating blood. All needles used by the Red Cross are new and sterile. Once a needle has been used it is thrown away.

Myth: The test for AIDS is conclusive. If it says I don't have the virus, I don't.

Fact: The AIDS blood test looks for the presence of HIV antibodies in the bloodstream. A negative test result does not necessarily mean that you are not infected. If HIV infection occurred three to six months prior to the test, the antibodies may have not yet appeared in the blood. If your test is negative you may still want to have another one in six months.

Myth: I have been monogamous (heterosexual or homosexual) for the past year, so I am not at risk.

Fact: Unless both you and your partner have never had sex with anyone else, shared needles or syringes for drugs, had a blood transfusion, or used any other blood product, you are both at some risk.

Myth: AIDS is not a prevalent disease in Canada, so I don't have to worry about it.

Fact: Canada has one of the highest rates of HIV infection in the world. Since AIDS was first reported in Canada in 1982, over 2,040 people have been infected. 1,113 Canadians have died from AIDS. It is estimated that over 50,000 Canadians are HIV positive.

For further information on AIDS contact:
York Council on the Prevention of AIDS
736-AIDS (2437)

North York Public Health Department
224-6344

AIDS Committee of Toronto
926-1626

Black Coalition for AIDS prevention
926-0063

Ontario Ministry of Health AIDS Hotline ("Let's Talk")
392-AIDS (2437)

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