

HIV/AIDS and the Workplace

You may be wondering what HIV and AIDS have to do with your job and workplace. Some people, like health care workers, may encounter HIV every day. Most professions do not need to give much thought to HIV when it comes to jobs. HIV is not transmitted through casual day-to-day contact that most people have in the workplace. Understanding HIV is important for both personal and professional reasons.

What you should know about HIV/AIDS and the workplace:

- HIV is the virus that causes AIDS, a disease that destroys a person's immune system.
- There are only a few ways that a person can contract HIV, most of which are not work-related situations.
- It is easy to protect yourself from contracting HIV, both in your personal life and in the workplace.

Some general information about HIV/AIDS:

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is the final stage of an infection caused by the **Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)**. HIV attacks the body's immune system, hurting the body's ability to fight off diseases and other infections.

There is no cure for HIV or AIDS. There are no clear symptoms of HIV. Some people may have flu-like symptoms for a few days after they have contracted HIV.

HIV medication, when taken as prescribed, can help a person living with HIV (PLWH) stay virally suppressed. This makes them unable to transmit the virus to others through sexual contact. **We call this Undetectable=Untransmittable (U=U).**

HIV transmits from person to person through the following body fluids:

- Blood
- Semen
- Anal secretions
- Vaginal secretions
- Breast milk

HIV is **NOT** transmitted through the environment; it is a very fragile blood-borne virus. PLWH do not pose a threat to co-workers or clients during casual day-to-day activities and contacts.

You CANNOT contract HIV through:

- Handshakes
- Hugs or casual touching
- Close working conditions
- Telephones, office equipment, or furniture
- Sinks, toilets, or showers
- Dishes, utensils, or food
- Sneezing or coughing
- Air
- Water
- Insects



There are only a few ways for a person to come in contact with HIV:

- By having sex, either anal, oral, or vaginal, without the use of a condom.
- Through sharing needles, syringes, and other instruments that break the skin, such as tattoo and/or ear/body piercing needles.
- From an HIV-diagnosed mother to her baby during pregnancy, birth, or breastfeeding.
- By encountering HIV-positive blood, either through an open wound or a blood transfusion. Risks from transfusions, however, are now very low because of blood screening, which started in 1985.

How HIV/AIDS affects you in your workplace::

As you can see from the information on the last page, most of the behaviors that pass HIV from one person to another do not occur in the workplace. The only way that most people in the average workplace can contract HIV is if they have an open wound and someone else's blood enters their body through that broken skin.

How to avoid HIV exposure in the workplace:

It is easy to avoid being exposed to HIV and other blood-borne diseases by using good personal hygiene and common sense at all times:

- Cover any broken skin with a clean, dry bandage.
- Avoid direct contact with blood spills.
- Wear gloves to clean visible blood spills.
- Clean blood spills with an appropriate disinfectant or a freshly mixed 1:10 solution of household bleach and water. After cleaning, thoroughly wash your hands with soap and running water.

Ways to reduce your risk of HIV exposure in your personal life:

- Do not have sex (abstain).
- Use a latex condom every time you have sex (oral, anal, or vaginal). If used correctly and every time you have sex, latex condoms can provide protection against HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
- If you believe you may have come into contact with HIV or are at high risk of contracting HIV, talk to your doctor about pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). PrEP are drugs given to people who are not living with HIV to help lower their chances of contracting HIV.
- Do not share needles or syringes. If you cannot stop sharing needles or syringes, clean them with bleach and then rinse them with water between every use.
- The best thing for your health is to stop using drugs. If you need help stopping, call the National Drug Abuse Hotline at 1-800-662-4357.

If you work with someone who is living with HIV and/or AIDS:

Remember, PLWH are just like everyone else and deserve the same respect, care, and kindness.

