



# HIV & AIDS: The Basics

## *Information and Resources on HIV/AIDS*

Provided by the Pierce County AIDS Foundation

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### True or False?

**Are the following statements true or false? See how many you can get right.**

1. HIV only affects homosexuals.
2. The spread of HIV can be prevented.
3. HIV is spread through casual contact.
4. Everyone who is sexually active or shooting drugs is at risk for HIV.
5. If you only have unprotected sex once, you're not at risk.
6. One in four HIV infections occur in youth between the ages of 15-24.
7. Abstinence from sex and drugs is not the best way to protect yourself from HIV.
8. Sensual massage is a safe alternative to unprotected sex.
9. Condoms help reduce the risk of getting HIV.
10. My friends and I cannot get HIV.

Spread the word, not HIV/AIDS. Tell your partners, friends, and family the facts about HIV and how to reduce their risk of getting HIV. Stop ignorance and fear through education.

### **Answers:**

1. F 2. T 3. F 4. T 5. F 6. T 7. F 8. T 9. T 10. F
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## What is HIV?

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. "Human" means that it infects people and not other animals like dogs or cats. "Immunodeficiency" means it attacks the immune system, the natural defense mechanism that protects our bodies against disease and infection. "Virus" means it is a microscopic organism that can only grow and reproduce with the aid of the cells it infects. HIV is a blood borne virus that infects cells of the immune system. HIV uses cells of your immune system to grow. When HIV has used one of these cells to grow, the cell can no longer function effectively, leaving your body without a part of its immune system.

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## Who gets HIV?

HIV was first seen in the United States primarily in gay males. Although gay men are still a high percentage of those infected with HIV, it is now in every community. In Pierce County:

- 31% are people of color
- 13% are women
- 27% are young people 20-29 years of age
- 40% were in poverty prior to diagnosis

The point is that anyone engaging in high risk behaviors is at risk for exposure to HIV. HIV/AIDS does not discriminate it sees no boundaries to its destruction.

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## How could I get HIV?

HIV spreads through blood, semen, vaginal fluids, and breast milk from infected people. People get HIV from contact with these fluids. Therefore, there are four general modes of transmission of HIV:

**1. Unprotected Sex.** Since HIV can live in both semen and vaginal fluids, it can get into your or your partner's bloodstream through small tears in the lining of the vagina, rectum, penis, or mouth. Getting any of these fluids in your system can be dangerous and risk transmission of the virus.

**2. Blood Contact or Shooting Drugs.** Because HIV is a blood borne virus, any contact with blood is risky if there is a chance of it entering your system; therefore, sharing works or doing anything else that risks blood-blood contact is very risky. Every time a syringe is used by a person infected with HIV a small amount of blood is left in the syringe. If it is then used by someone else, without being cleaned, the virus will be directly injected into the bloodstream. Also, getting blood on an open sore or cut can risk transmission of HIV.

**3. Mother to Child.** HIV can pass from a mother to her infant while either in the womb, during birth, or during nursing after birth.

HIV is **not** spread through everyday contact, hugging, kissing, using the same toilet, or bug bites.

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## How can I protect myself?

The most important thing to know about HIV/AIDS is that it is preventable. If you abstain from IV drug use and sex, you are virtually at no risk for transmission of HIV; otherwise, follow the following easy risk reduction practices to decrease your chances of HIV transmission:

- **Avoid unsafe sex.** Many of the things that feel good are safe because no blood, semen, or vaginal secretions get into the body. This includes hugging, kissing, fantasizing, masturbation, and massage.
  - **Use latex condoms.** Unless you are 100% sure your partner is not infected with HIV, reduce your risk by using a latex condom (rubber) from start to finish every time you have sex.
  - **Use spermicides.** Spermicides found in birth control foams, jellies, and lubricants are best used along with condoms, not in place of them.
  - **Use only water-based lubricants.** Lubricants containing oil, like Vaseline(R) petroleum jelly, can damage a condom and cause it to break.
  - **Never share needles.** If you shoot drugs, seek help to stop. If you must share, clean your needle.
  - **Don't mix alcohol or other drugs with sex.** They might cloud your judgment and lead to unsafe sex.
  - **Don't share sex toys.** They have body fluids and possibly blood on them.
  - **Get tested.** If you have ever done IV drugs or had unprotected sex, get testing and counseling; then you can have peace of mind.
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## Community Resources

**Pierce County AIDS Foundation (253) 383-2565**

**AIDS Prevention Partnership (253) 383-3452**

**Syringe Exchange (Pt. Defiance AIDS Project) (253) 272-4789**  
**Tacoma Urban League (253) 383-3006**

**OASIS Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth Support Center (253) 534-3204**

**People of Color Against AIDS Network (POCAAN) (253) 272-2577**

**Washington State AIDS Hotline 1-800-272-2437**

**Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department (253) 798-6060**