

Tell me a bit more about HIV....

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. HIV makes copies of its own genetic material inside human T-cells. It then uses the T-cells to make more of the virus. This process destroys the healthy t-cells, destroying the immune system. If left untreated, HIV can progress and develop into AIDS.

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, and occurs when HIV advances and weakens the immune system to the point that the body can no longer fight off illness and infections.

HIV is not AIDS. AIDS *can* develop as a result of HIV infection.

While there is currently no cure for HIV or AIDS, the medications that are now available to treat HIV are highly effective. HIV is now considered a chronic illness, rather than a terminal disease. HIV+ individuals who are receiving treatment can live indefinitely without developing AIDS.

Studies show that people who are HIV+ and have access to treatment can have close to normal life expectancies. HIV+ children can grow up, go to college, get married, have babies, etc.!

On treatment, the amount of HIV can be brought so low in a person's blood that it is considered "undetectable."

HIV is not an airborne or food-borne virus and dies quickly outside the body.

HIV can *only* be spread through pregnancy and birth; breastmilk; sexual activity that mixes bodily fluids such as blood, semen, and vaginal fluid; and through blood to blood contact (such as sharing needles).

HIV+ children are not a risk to people around them, as HIV cannot be spread through casual contact. HIV is not spread through hugs, shaking hands, holding hands, coughing, sneezing, changing diapers, sharing or preparing food, sharing utensils or dishes, kissing, sharing office or classroom space, mosquito bites, bathing, swimming or any other causal way. HIV is not transmitted through urine, stool, mucous, tears or sweat. There are no documented cases of HIV being transmitted in through normal contact in a school setting, childcare setting, or through normal household contact in the home.

With the amazing advances in treatment for HIV, many families find that their primary concern has been the fear and stigma that still accompany the disease. You can change this by learning more and by sharing what you know!

Please remember that an individual's HIV status is protected by confidentiality laws. For more information on transmission, see the Center for Disease Control website at <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/factsheets/transmission.htm>

