



## Fact Sheet

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Student Health Services, Texas A&M University

### HIV/AIDS

#### Get the facts about HIV/AIDS

- **HIV** is the virus that causes **AIDS**, a disease that destroys the body's ability to fight off infections.
- There is no cure for HIV or AIDS.
- AIDS is usually fatal.
- People become infected with HIV because of what they do, **not who they are**.
- There are only a few ways you can become infected with HIV.
- You can protect yourself from becoming infected with HIV.
- A blood test can show if you have been infected with HIV. The test is confidential.
- If you are infected with HIV, there are things you can do to stay healthy.

#### What are HIV & AIDS?

**HIV** (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is the virus that causes **AIDS** (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). HIV damages the immune system, the part of the body that fights infection. Eventually, the immune system becomes so weak that diseases and infections begin to attack the body. As these conditions worsen, a person is diagnosed with AIDS.

#### How can you tell if someone is infected with HIV?

You cannot tell if someone has HIV or AIDS by looking at them. A person infected with HIV may look healthy and feel fine, but they can still pass the virus to you. A blood test is the only way a person can find out if he or she is infected with HIV. **Anyone** can become infected with HIV. It has nothing to do with race, age, religion, nationality, or sexual orientation. People get infected with HIV because of what they do, not who they are.

#### How do you get infected with HIV?

- HIV is spread through blood, semen, vaginal secretions, and breast milk. Contact with these body fluids puts you at risk for HIV infection.
- The most common ways people are infected with HIV are:
  - ⇒ Having sex (anal, vaginal, or oral) with someone who is infected with HIV, and
  - ⇒ Sharing needles or syringes with someone who is infected. This includes sharing needles to shoot drugs or vitamins, to pierce body parts, or for tattoos.
  - ⇒ A woman with HIV infection can pass the virus to her baby during pregnancy or at birth. A few babies have also been infected by breast-feeding from their infected mother.
  - ⇒ Although all donated blood has been screened for HIV since 1985, some people got the virus by receiving HIV-infected blood products between 1978 and 1985. You cannot get HIV by giving blood.