



**Developmental  
Disabilities  
Planning Council**

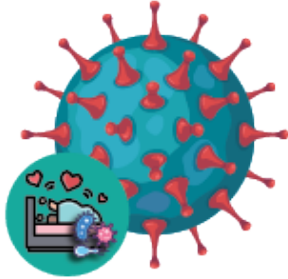
*Easy Read Edition*

# **A Self-Advocate's Guide to Safer Sex**

**Part 5: What is HIV? What is  
AIDS? How can you prevent HIV  
and AIDS?**

## Part 5: What is HIV? What is AIDS? How can you prevent HIV and AIDS?

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**HIV** is a germ that makes it hard for your body to fight other germs.

HIV kills off the parts of your body that fight off germs.

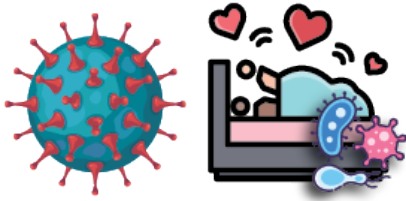


This can make it very easy to get sick.



Without treatment, people with HIV often get sick with diseases that people without HIV can fight off easily. Without treatment, people with HIV can easily die of diseases that do not make people without HIV very sick.

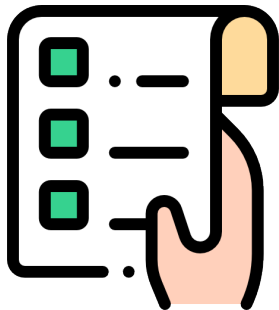
# How can you get HIV?



HIV is an STI.



That means you can get HIV through having sex.



There are other ways you can get HIV.

Here are some other ways that you can get HIV:

## Sharing Needles

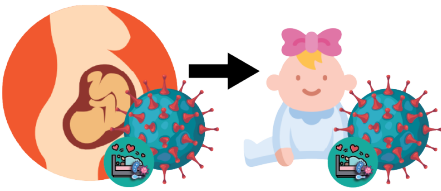


By sharing needles, syringes, and other injection supplies with other people who have HIV if you inject drugs. This most often happens with people who inject drugs for fun, like heroin.



But it can also happen if you share needles, syringes, and other supplies for injecting prescription drugs as well.

## During Pregnancy

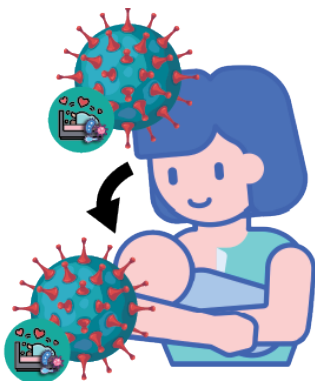


Pregnant people who have HIV can give HIV to their fetus if they are not on HIV medication.



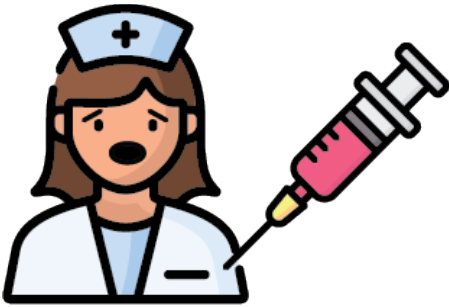
(Fetus is what we call the new human growing inside a pregnant person.)

## While Breastfeeding

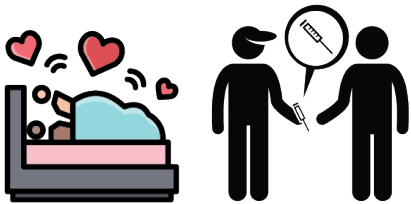


Breastfeeding people who have HIV can give HIV to their babies if they are not on medication.

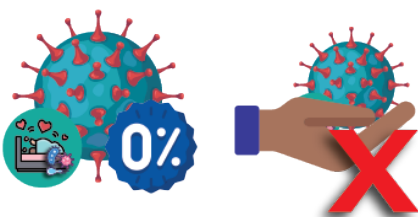
## Needlesticks in Health Care Settings



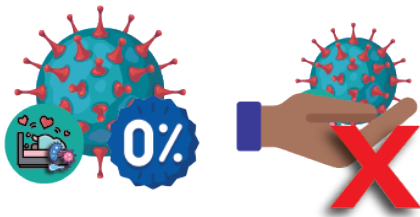
Health care workers can sometimes get HIV if they get body fluids from someone with HIV in them. For example, a nurse could get accidentally stuck with a needle that has blood from a person with HIV on it. The nurse could get HIV from the needlestick.



You need to have some kind of contact (such as sexual contact or sharing needles) with someone with HIV to get HIV.



You cannot get HIV from someone who does not have HIV.

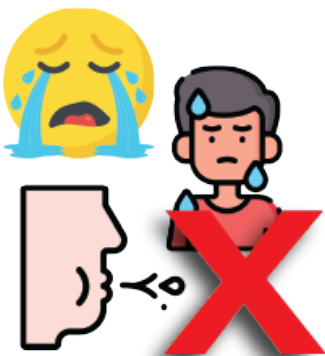


HIV does not just happen from certain kinds of contact unless one person has HIV.

You **cannot** get HIV through these activities:



- Through insect bites (like mosquito bites)



- Through spitting, crying, or sweating



- Through hugging



- Through shaking hands



- Through sharing items like toilet seats or dishes



- Through eating food that someone with HIV cooked



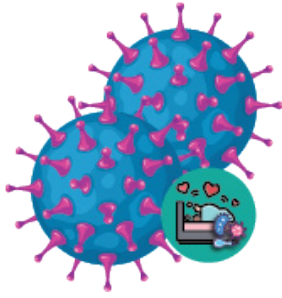
- Through touching someone



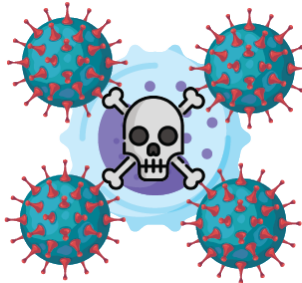
- Through the air



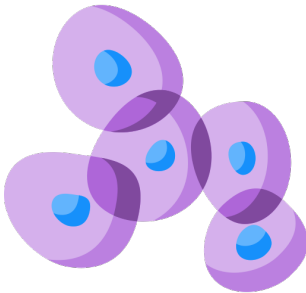
# What is AIDS?



**AIDS** is a disease caused by HIV.



When HIV gets inside your body, the HIV germs kill off certain cells in your body.



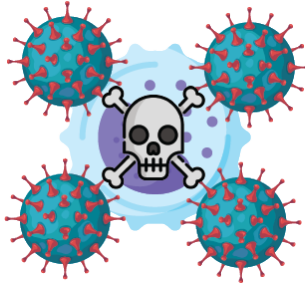
(Remember, cells are tiny living organisms that make up your body.)



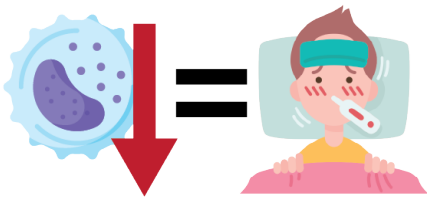
These cells are called CD4 cells.



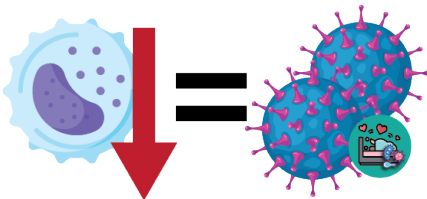
CD4 cells help your body fight off germs.



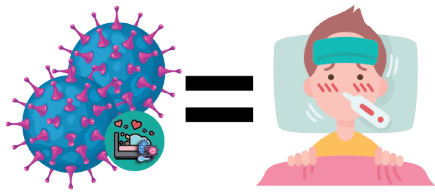
If a person with HIV does not get proper medication and treatment, the HIV germs will keep killing off CD4 cells.



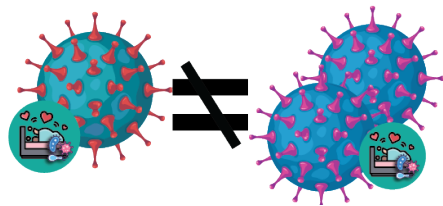
If a person's CD4 cell count gets too low, the person can get very sick.



If a person has HIV and their CD4 cell count gets too low, that person has AIDS.



People with AIDS can get very sick.



Not everyone with HIV has AIDS.



People with HIV can take medication to stop themselves from getting AIDS.



The best way to prevent HIV from causing AIDS is to test for HIV.



That way, if someone has HIV, they will know they have HIV.



Then, they can get medication to stop them from getting AIDS.

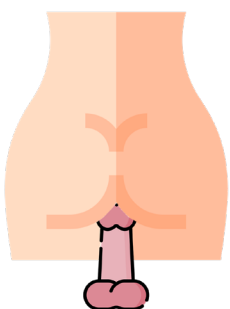
## Who is most at risk?



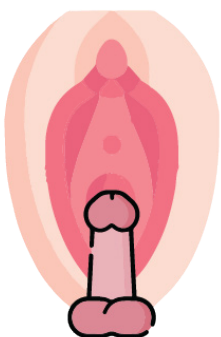
Your risk of getting HIV is different for different kinds of sex.



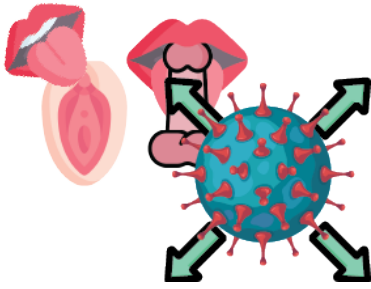
HIV is most likely to spread through anal sex.



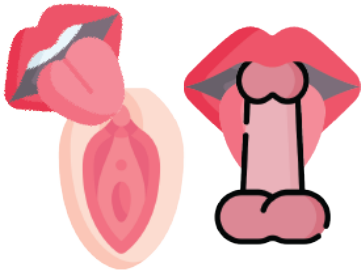
Anal sex is when one person puts their penis inside another person's rectum (butt).



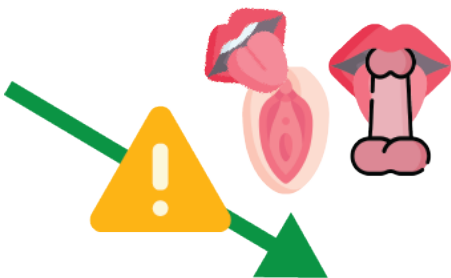
HIV can also spread through vaginal sex (where one person puts their penis inside another person's vagina).



HIV can also spread through oral sex.



Oral sex is where one person puts their mouth on another person's penis, vagina, or anus (butt).



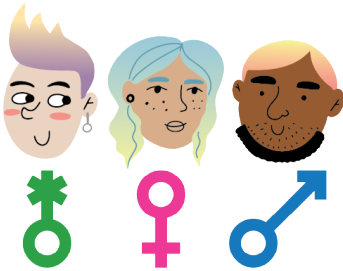
But it is very rare for someone to get HIV through oral sex.

# Health disparities and HIV

Anyone can get HIV, no matter their:



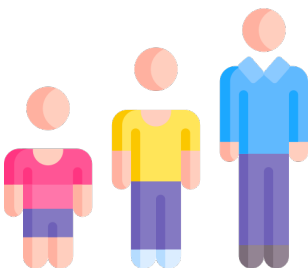
- Sexuality.



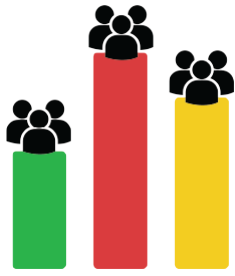
- Gender.



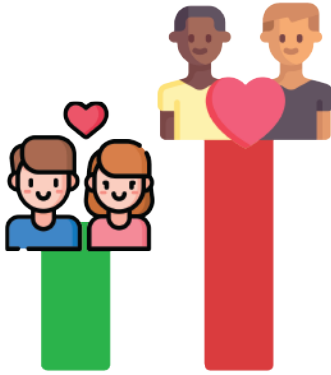
- Race/ethnicity.



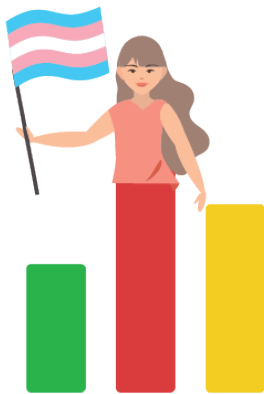
- Age.



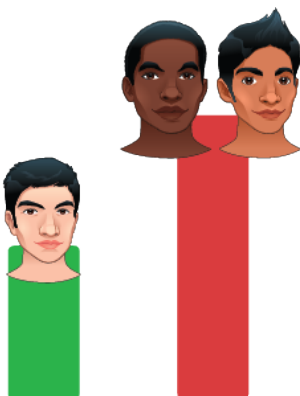
Certain groups are more likely to get HIV than other groups.



Men who have sex with men are more likely to get HIV than men who have sex with women.

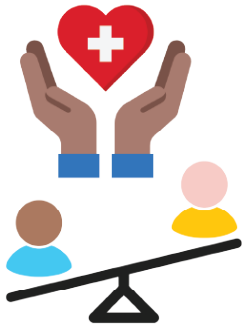


Transgender women are also more likely to get HIV than cisgender women.

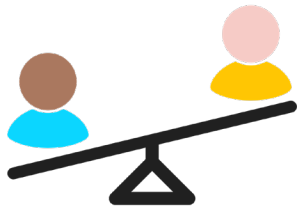


Black people and Latinx people are more likely to get HIV than white people.

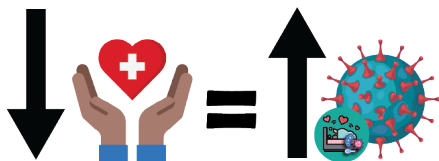




Sometimes, this is because of disparities in health care.



A **disparity** is an unfair difference between two groups.



A lot of groups of people that are more likely to get HIV have worse access to health care.



That means people in these groups are less likely to have access to medications that can prevent HIV, like PrEP.



(We talk about PrEP in a later section.)



People in these groups are less likely to have access to testing for HIV.



People in these groups are less likely to be taking medication for their HIV if they have HIV.



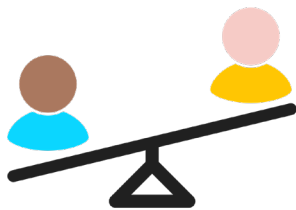
All these things are unfair!



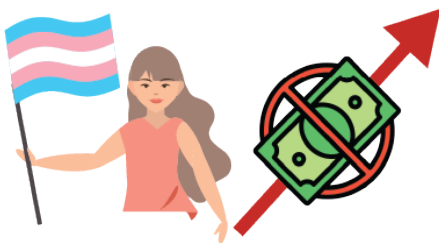
Everyone should have good access to health care.



Everyone should have good access to HIV prevention, testing, and treatment.



Other times, this is because of other kinds of disparities.



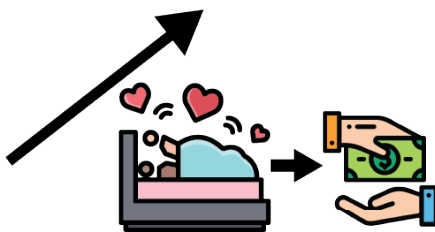
For example, transgender women are more likely to be poor or not have a job than cisgender women.



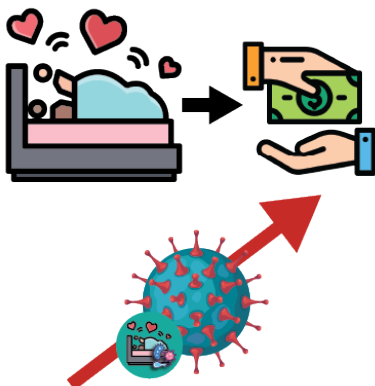
This is because of transphobia and transmisogyny.



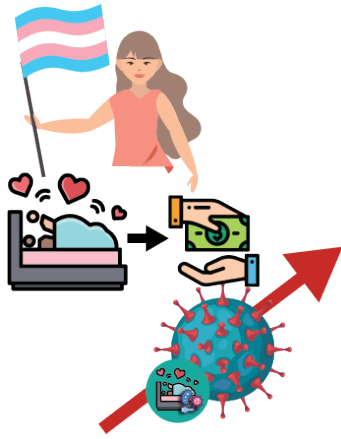
**Transmisogyny** is bad treatment of transgender women.



Transgender women who are poor or do not have a job are more likely to have sex with people to earn money.



People who have sex to earn money are more likely to get HIV.



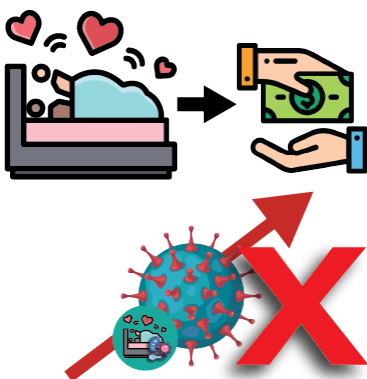
So, transgender women who have sex to earn money are more likely to get HIV.



This is unfair!



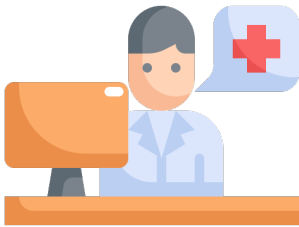
Transgender women should not have to deal with transphobia and transmisogyny.



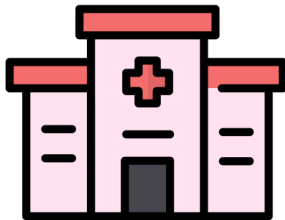
People who have sex to earn money should not be more likely to get HIV.

# Testing

You can get tested for HIV, just like you can for other STIs. You can get tested for HIV in the following places:



- A doctor's office.



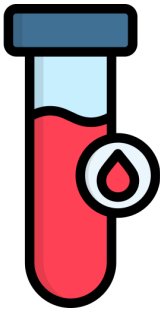
- A health office or health clinic.



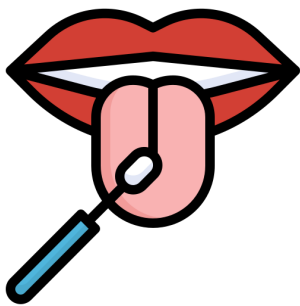
- At home, using a self-test.



HIV tests look for signs of HIV in your body fluids.



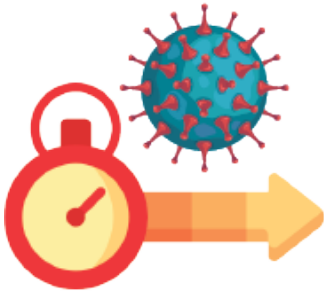
Most HIV tests involve taking a blood sample to look for HIV in your blood.



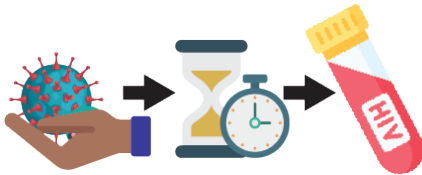
Some self-tests take a saliva (spit) sample to look for HIV in your saliva (spit).



HIV tests cannot look for HIV right after you might have gotten HIV.



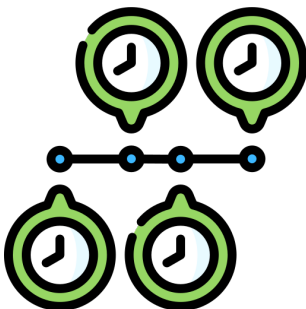
All HIV tests have a **window period**.



A window period is the time between when you might have gotten HIV and when a test can look for HIV.



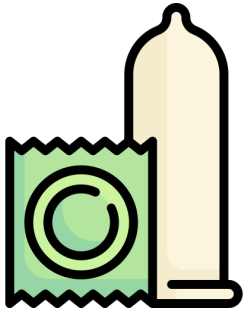
Window periods for different HIV tests can range from 10 days to 90 days.



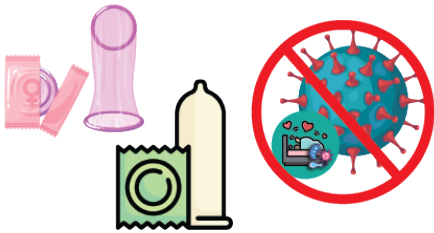
It depends on the test.



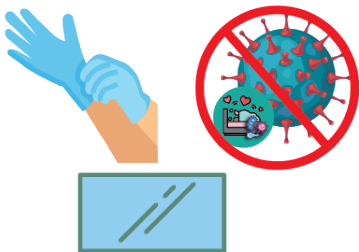
## Prevention



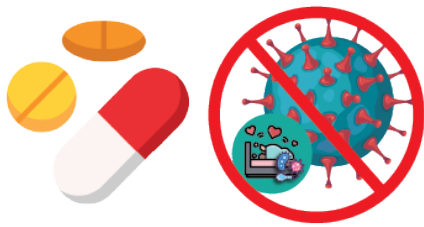
Using a condom or other barrier method is a good way to help prevent HIV and other STIs.



Both internal and external condoms can help prevent you from getting or giving someone HIV.



Dental dams and gloves can also help prevent you from getting or giving someone HIV.



There are also medications that can help prevent you from getting HIV.



We will talk about them more in the next section.

## PrEP and PEP



There are two medications that can prevent you from getting HIV.



They are PrEP and PEP.

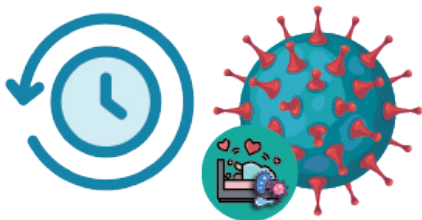


## *PrEP*

**PrEP** is short for “pre-exposure prophylaxis.”



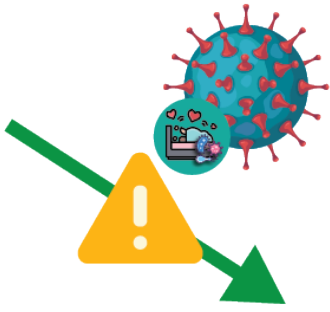
“Prophylaxis” means “prevention.”



“Pre-exposure” means “before you are exposed” to HIV.

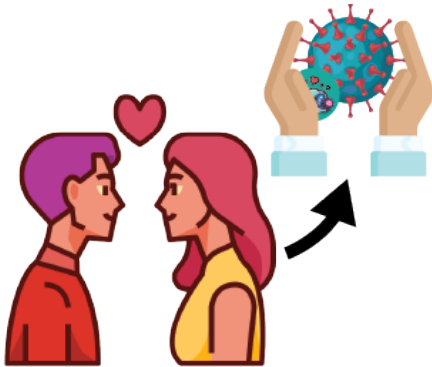


PrEP is a medication you take everyday to prevent getting HIV.

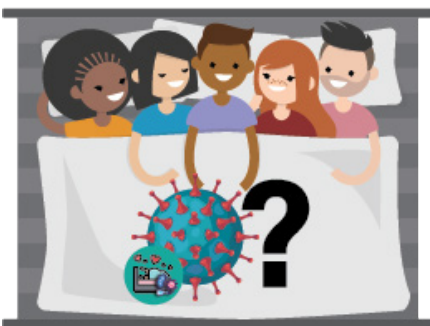


PrEP can make your chance of getting HIV smaller, even if you do not use condoms.

Here are some reasons why people use PrEP:



- They have a sexual partner who has HIV.



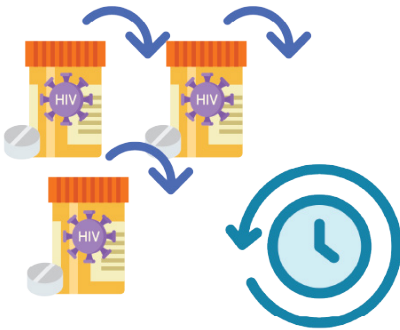
- They have multiple sexual partners and do not know all of their partners' HIV status.



- They have gotten another STI in the recent past.



- They do not use condoms during sex.



- They have used PEP multiple times in the past. We will talk about what PEP is in the next section.



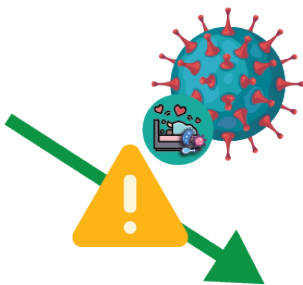
PrEP comes in two forms: pills and shots.



You can take PrEP as a daily pill.



You can also take PrEP as a shot you get every 2 months.



Both ways reduce your risk of getting HIV.



Both ways work well to keep you safer when you have sex.



If you are interested in PrEP, talk to your doctor.



Your doctor can write you a prescription for PrEP.

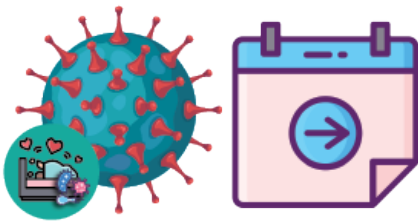


## PEP

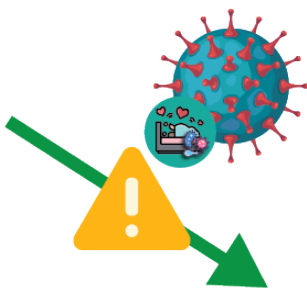
**PEP** is short for “post-exposure prophylaxis.”



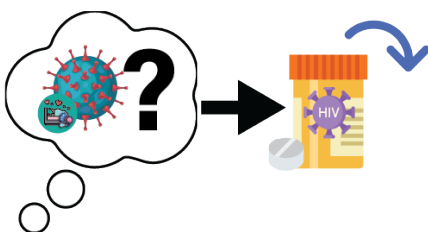
“Prophylaxis” means “prevention.”



“Post-exposure” means “after you are exposed” to HIV.



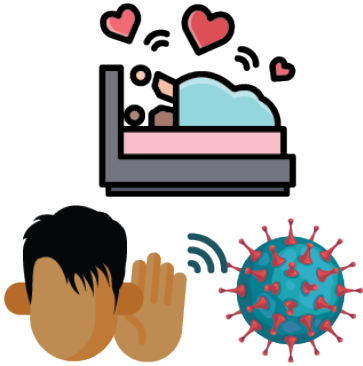
PEP can make your chance of getting HIV smaller.



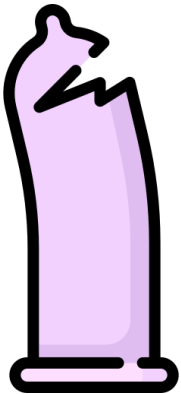
You take PEP after you might have been exposed to HIV.



Some ways you might be exposed to HIV are:



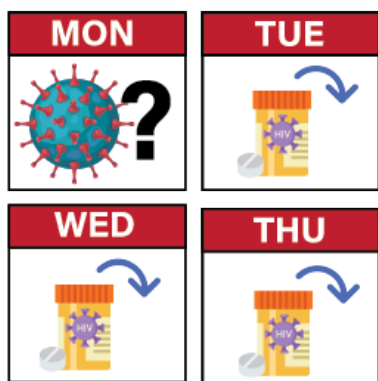
- You have sex with someone you find out has HIV.



- You are having sex with someone who you are not sure has HIV and your condom breaks.



- You were sexually assaulted. Sexually assaulted means you were forced to have sex with someone.



You need to start PEP within 72 hours (3 days) of when you might have been exposed to HIV.



Otherwise, PEP will not work.



You can get PEP from your doctor.



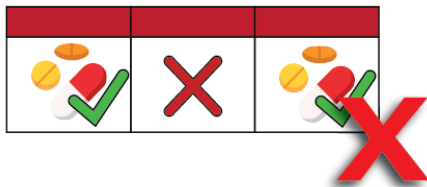
You can also get PEP from an urgent care or emergency room doctor.



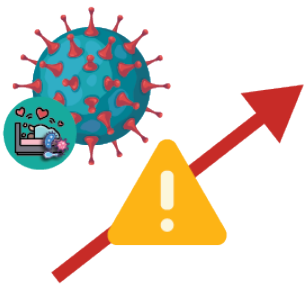
PEP comes as pills.



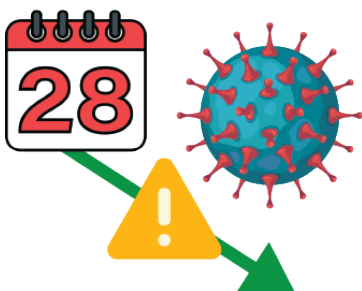
You need to take the pills exactly as you are told for 28 days.



If you do not take the pills correctly, they will not work correctly.



Then, your risk for getting HIV is higher.



If you take PEP correctly for the entire 28 days, your risk of getting HIV is very small.

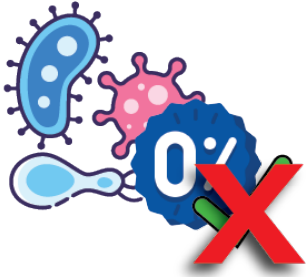


You should not use PEP as your main way of preventing HIV.

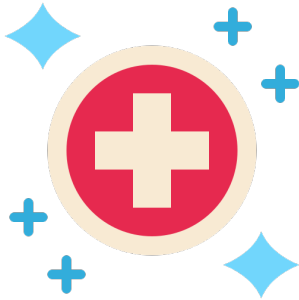


If you have to take multiple courses of PEP, talk to your doctor about PrEP instead.

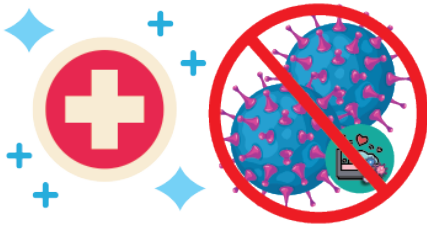
## Treatment



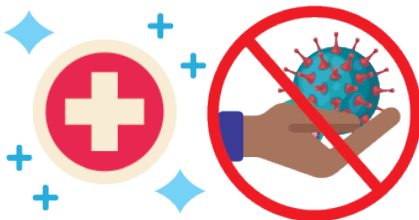
There is no cure for HIV.



But if you have HIV, you can get treatment.



This treatment can keep you from getting sick with AIDS.



This treatment can keep you from giving HIV to other people, like sexual partners.

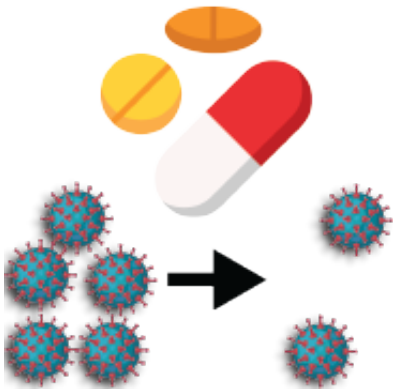


This treatment is medications, either as pills or shots.

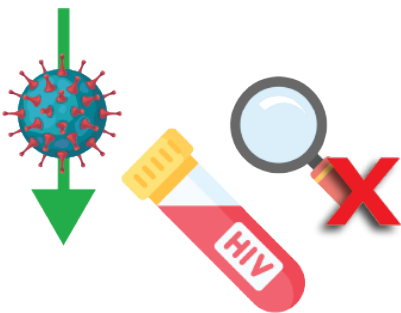
*What does undetectable =  
untransmittable (U=U) mean?*



HIV tests work by looking for HIV in your blood.



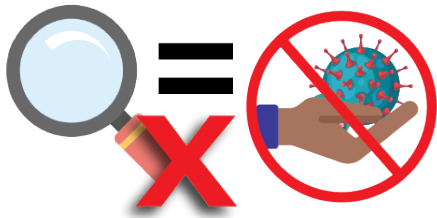
Taking medication for HIV can reduce the amount of HIV germs in your blood.



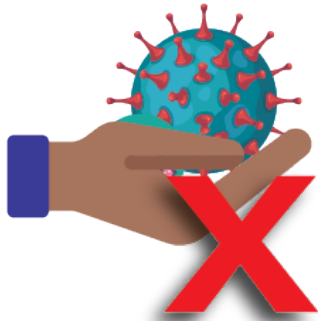
When you have very, very little HIV in your blood, the test cannot find it.



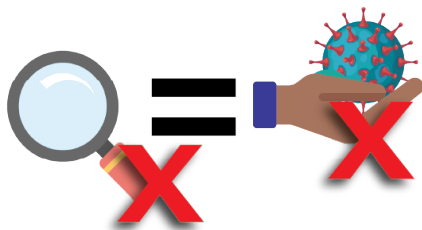
This is called being **undetectable**.



If the amount of HIV in your blood is undetectable, you cannot give HIV to a sexual partner, even if you have sex without condoms or PrEP.



This is called being **untransmittable**.



When people say “undetectable = untransmittable,” they mean if the amount of HIV in your blood is low enough, you cannot give HIV to a sexual partner.