

# HIV/AIDS Fact Sheet

## What is HIV?

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is the virus that causes AIDS. It attacks the human immune system. Over time (and without effective treatment), HIV gradually destroys the body's defenses against disease, leaving it vulnerable to many infections and cancers that would not normally develop in healthy people.

Even without treatment, some people with HIV infection have no symptoms at all, some have mild health problems, while others have severe health problems associated with AIDS. While HIV/AIDS can be physically devastating, its victims also suffer sociologically and relationally because of the stigma associated with the disease.

## What is AIDS?

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is a late stage of HIV infection. By the time a diagnosis of AIDS is made, HIV will already have seriously damaged the body's immune system. Often, a person with an AIDS diagnosis will already have had a life-threatening infection or cancer.

New treatments are radically slowing the destruction of the immune system caused by HIV and lengthening life expectancy. Some people with HIV infection may never develop AIDS.

## How is HIV transmitted?

While HIV cannot be transmitted through casual contact, many of those living with the disease are unfairly stigmatized and face severe prejudice in their communities. This stigmatization often prevents people from being tested and/or seeking treatment both locally and internationally.

## HIV is spread in the following ways:

- *Unprotected sexual intercourse*
- *Injection drug use*
- *From an infected mother to her infant*

**HIV is *rarely* transmitted in the following ways:**

- *Blood transfusions and organ transplants*
- *The health care setting*

**HIV is *NOT* transmitted by:**

*Casual contact...*HIV is not spread by casual contact. It dies quickly outside the body and is easily killed by soap and by common disinfectants such as bleach. There is no risk of HIV infection from:

- donating blood
- mosquito bites
- toilet seats
- shaking hands
- hugging
- sharing eating utensils
- food or objects handled by people with HIV or AIDS
- spending time in the same house, business, or public place with a person with HIV/AIDS

*Information courtesy Public Health – Seattle & King County*