

# HIV Info Sheet

## What are HIV and AIDS?

**HIV** stands for **Human Immunodeficiency Virus**. HIV is a virus that attacks the immune system, eventually making it too weak to protect the body from otherwise treatable illnesses. HIV has no symptoms; a person can have it and look healthy.

When a person is HIV positive and their immune system has become so weak that it succumbs to other illnesses it is called **Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome** or **AIDS**. AIDS symptoms related to whatever illness has made a person sick in their weakened immune state.

How is HIV contracted?	How can HIV be prevented?
1. Through <b>sex with an infected partner</b> .	To prevent HIV in this case, abstaining from sex entirely, or being faithful to one, uninfected partner who is also completely faithful to you, or use male or female condoms properly every time you have sex.
2. From an infected <b>mother to her child</b> , including during pregnancy, birth and through breast milk.	To prevent HIV in this case, provide the mother and baby with appropriate medicines throughout, perform a caesarean section, if possible, and maintain consistent breast-feeding during the first months of the baby's life.
3. Through <b>contact with infected blood</b> , as in using old, used or non-sterile needles, blood transfusions, or other blood-to-blood contact.	Avoid contact with others' blood, including always using new needles and wearing gloves. In most places now, blood is tested before transfusions happen, so this risk is low. Ask your hospital or health center for more information about their services.

HIV is not transmitted through:  
Mosquitoes;  
Kissing, shaking hands or hugging;  
Saliva; Toilet seats; or  
Sharing cups, cutlery or dishes

## Can drugs **reduce risk** for contracting **HIV**?

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), are drugs that reduce the risk of being infected with HIV. Different countries have different definitions of what level of HIV risk is sufficient to warrant use of PrEP.<sup>1</sup>

*PEP* is a short-term drug treatment that reduces a person's chance of becoming infected with HIV after possible exposure to the virus, such as after sexual violence, contact with someone else's blood, etc.

## Why get tested for HIV?

The only sure way to know your HIV status is by going for HIV testing. In many places, the results of a HIV test are available that same day. Knowing your status allows you to take better care of yourself, get treated, protect your partner from contracting the virus, inform your past sexual partners so they can also be tested and make informed decisions about your future!

## What is ART?

**ART (or antiretroviral therapy)** is a combination of at least three antiretroviral (ARV) drugs that slow down the reproduction rate of HIV. ART will not remove HIV from a person's blood. ART is a treatment for AIDS, not a cure. ART will help the immune system to become stronger, to slow the production of the virus and to improve the individual's health and prolong her/his life.

## What is the connection between women, violence and HIV?

**58%** of people living with HIV in Sub-Saharan Africa are women.<sup>2</sup> Globally, **young women** aged **15-24** account for **4 in 10** new infections in Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>3</sup>

When girls and women lack power in their relationships, families and communities, they are more vulnerable to violence and more vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. For many women, the violence they experience leads to HIV infection. For others, their HIV positive status brings violence, which can speed up the onset of AIDS. In many places, women who disclose their HIV status are at an increased risk for violence against them. This means that it is essential to never force women to reveal their results. They have to make this decision for themselves.

## How can a person live positively?

It is very challenging to receive a HIV-positive test result. Remember that many people are HIV positive, and they continue to live happy and healthy lives.

Key decisions that you may choose to talk about with a trusted friend or religious leader include:

- Who might you tell about your status? How will you tell them?
- How can you learn more about the disease and how to avoid transmitting it to others?
- How can you stay healthy and take care of your body and mind?
- What are the treatment options in your area?
- Are there support groups or people in your faith community where you could seek help?

## Learn More!

This info sheet is part of *SASA! Faith*. *SASA! Faith* is a guide to help religious communities to work together to prevent violence against women and HIV. It involves many community members engaging in fun and interesting community activities and opportunities. To learn more about **SASA! Faith** and how to get involved, contact:

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization. (2015). *Guideline on when to start antiretroviral therapy and on pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV*. Retrieved on November 20, 2015 from: [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/186275/1/9789241509565\\_eng.pdf](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/186275/1/9789241509565_eng.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> UNAIDS. (2014). *Fact Sheet 2014*. Retrieved on November 20, 2015 from: [http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/fact-sheet/2014/20140716\\_FactSheet\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/fact-sheet/2014/20140716_FactSheet_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> AVERT. (2015). HIV and AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa Regional Overview. Retrieved on November 20, 2015 from: <http://www.avert.org/professionals/hiv-around-world/sub-saharan-africa/overview>