

# HIV & AIDS

## What are the stages of HIV?

There are three main phases of HIV:

### Phase 1: Acute HIV Infection

- Early on in HIV infection people may experience flu-like symptoms which may last for a few weeks.
- The only way to know if one has HIV in this stage is by an antigen/antibody test or nucleic acid test.

### Phase 2: Clinical Latency

- During this phase, HIV is still active, but reproduces at very low levels. People may not have any symptoms during this time.
- This period can last a decade or longer, but for others this phase is much shorter.
- At the end of this phase, an individual's viral load starts to go up and their CD4 cell count begins to go down.

### Phase 3: Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS)

- AIDS is the most severe phase of HIV infection, often being accompanied by other infections, such as pneumonia and meningitis due to a compromised immune system.
- Without treatment, people may pass away from AIDS-related complications and co-infections.

## How is HIV treated?

- HIV cannot be cured, but it can be treated using ART. Taking this as directed drops the amount of virus in the blood to an undetectable level. An undetectable viral load allows for a healthier and longer life.
- ART should start as soon as possible after diagnosis; if treatment is delayed, the virus will continue to attack your immune system which leads to the development of AIDS.
- PrEP, or pre-exposure prophylaxis, helps to prevent HIV if you are having sex with someone who has HIV. PrEP does not prevent you from getting any other STDs.
- Talk to your provider about U=U (undetectable=untransmittable), and how medication can help lower your risk of spreading HIV.

## How is HIV transmitted?

- HIV can be transmitted by blood, vaginal fluid, pre-seminal fluid (pre-cum), semen, and breastmilk.
- HIV can be transmitted through genital, anal, or oral sex, sharing used needles, works, or other injection equipment, or passed from mother to baby during pregnancy, birth, or breastfeeding.
- HIV is **NOT** transmitted by air, water, saliva, sweat, tears, insects, pets, sharing toilets, food, or drinks.

## How do I protect myself against HIV?

- Use condoms correctly (see reverse side for instructions) every time you have anal or vaginal sex.
- Limit your number of sex partners; do not share needles or works.
- Contact Allegheny County Health Department, Allies for Health and Wellbeing, or Central Outreach Wellness Center about PrEP. If you think you have been exposed to HIV within the last 3 days, ask about Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP).

## Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is the virus that can lead to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) if left untreated.

- HIV attacks the body's immune system.
- There is no effective cure as of now, but with proper medical care, HIV/AIDS can be controlled using anti-retroviral therapy (ART).
- By taking ART as prescribed, the viral load (amount of HIV in the blood) can become undetectable, meaning one can live a healthy life and have no risk of transmitting HIV to others.
- HIV can be prevented by taking pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).