HIV/AIDS Program

What Do I Need To Know?

NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT of HEALTH

A Fact Sheet About HIV and AIDS

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is the virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome)

HIV slowly breaks down the body's immune system, leading to an advanced stage of HIV disease known as AIDS. AIDS is diagnosed when a person has a T-cell count of less than 200 or a specific type of illness as a result of HIV infection.

HIV is Transmitted Through….

- Blood, semen, vaginal secretions and breast milk of a person with HIV
- Unprotected oral, anal and vaginal sex
- Sharing injection needles
- Perinatal transmission (from mother to child in the womb or at birth)
- Breastfeeding

HIV is NOT Transmitted Through…

- Kissing or holding hands
- Mosquitoes
- Sharing bathrooms
- Sneezing or coughing
- Normal workplace, daycare or school interaction

To Protect Yourself from HIV…

- Choose not to have sex.
- Use a latex or polyurethane condom with water-based lubricant every time you have vaginal or anal sex.
- Use a latex or polyurethane condom or barrier (a dental dam) for oral sex.
- Don't share injection needles.
- Talk with sexual partners about their HIV status and consider testing for HIV.
- Don't use oil-based lubricants (lotion, Vaseline, etc.); they can weaken a condom causing it to leak or break.
- Don't have sex when you are drunk or high; using alcohol or other drugs affects judgment and can lead to unsafe sex.

HIV Testing

HIV tests look for HIV antibodies and not the virus itself. A person's body responds to HIV by developing antibodies to help fight off the virus. It can take up to three months (in rare cases, six months) to develop HIV antibodies after infection. The window period refers to the period of time between HIV exposure and when enough antibodies are produced so that an accurate test can be performed. The average time it takes for someone infected with HIV to develop and test positive for HIV antibodies is 25 days, but the window period can be as long as three months (in rare cases, six months) after exposure.

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What Does a Negative Test Result Mean?

- It means that no HIV antibodies were in your body at the time of the test.
- This may mean that you do not have HIV or that you have HIV but your body has not made HIV antibodies.
- Because of the window period, get tested again at least three months after any risky behavior to know your HIV status.

What Does a Positive Result Mean?

- It means that HIV antibodies are in your body and you have HIV.
- Learning that you are HIV-positive, you may feel shocked, angry, sad or overwhelmed and not know what to do first.
- You can talk to your HIV test counselor to learn about different options available, or just to talk with someone about your recent diagnosis.

HIV Treatment

There is no cure for HIV/AIDS. Yet, there are drugs used to slow down the damage that HIV does to the immune system. When they are effective, these drugs can reduce the amount of HIV in a person's body. The drugs do not work for everyone or totally rid the body of the virus. The virus continues to actively make copies of itself but does this work hidden in certain areas of the body until a person's immune system can no longer fight them as effectively. A person can still transmit HIV to someone else by having unsafe sex or sharing needles, even when the amount of virus is not detectable.

For More Information Contact:

North Dakota Department of Health
HIV/AIDS Program
Website: www.ndhiv.com
Toll-Free Information Line:
1-800-70-NDHIV (1-800-706-3448)