

# Understanding HIV Prevention

## I am HIV positive and don't want to infect others. What should I do?

Understanding how HIV is transmitted is an important step in prevention. Talk with your doctor about how HIV is transmitted and what you can do to prevent infecting others. Each time you visit your doctor, discuss your high-risk behaviors, such as unprotected sex and needle sharing.

You may feel reluctant to talk with your doctor about your high-risk behaviors. It can be difficult to change behaviors, even when you want to. However, it is important to be honest with your doctor about risky activities. You and your doctor can then discuss ways to minimize the risk of infecting others.

If you are a woman, you and your doctor should discuss ways to prevent pregnancy. If you want to become pregnant, you and your doctor can talk about what you should do to prevent transmitting HIV to your baby (see [HIV During Pregnancy, Labor and Delivery, and After Birth Fact Sheet Series](#)).

## How can I prevent infecting someone else?

Successful HIV treatment can lower your viral load, which may reduce the risk of HIV transmission. But there are other factors that influence sexual transmission of HIV, such as:

- presence of other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)
- genital irritation
- menstruation
- lack of circumcision in men
- taking birth control pills
- hormone imbalances
- vitamin and mineral deficiencies

Always use prevention strategies, such as condoms and safer sex practices. If you inject drugs, don't share your works with anyone else. Talk with your doctor if you have trouble sticking to these prevention strategies. You and your doctor can then find ways to make your high-risk behaviors safer.

## Should I tell my partners that I am HIV infected?

Yes. It is very important that you tell your sexual partners and people with whom you have shared injected drugs that they may have been exposed to HIV and should be tested. You and your doctor can discuss the best way to notify your partners. Some health departments and HIV clinics have anonymous partner notification systems—your partners are told that they have been exposed but are not told who reported their names or when the reported exposure occurred.

It is important to use HIV prevention strategies even if your partner is also HIV positive. Your partner may have a different strain of the virus that could act differently in your body or be resistant to different anti-HIV medications.

## I am taking anti-HIV medications and my viral load is undetectable. Am I cured? Can I infect others?

An undetectable viral load does not mean that you are cured. It means that the amount of HIV in your blood is so low that the viral load tests cannot detect it. You are still infected with HIV and can infect others. You should continue to use prevention strategies and should see your doctor regularly.

## For more information:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Prevention Information Network (NPIN) provides information about prevention of HIV infection, other STDs, and tuberculosis.

If you have questions about ways to prevent transmitting HIV, contact your doctor or a CDC NPIN Information Specialist at 1-800-458-5231 or visit <http://cdcpin.org>.