



Recently diagnosed

Women and HIV: A series of factsheets for women about HIV

You are not alone

If you have just been told that you are HIV positive you may feel confused, angry, sad, alone or you may feel nothing at all. Most women will experience some of these feelings when they find out they have HIV. These feelings usually change over time.

It's important for you to know that:

- There is hope! HIV is not a death sentence in Australia
- You are not alone. In Australia there are many women who are living with HIV
- You can get support
- You can talk to other women who are HIV positive
- You can live an active and healthy life
- You can still have sex
- You can have children.

Remember

- There are effective treatments available
- Connect with a doctor for support and regular blood tests
- Give yourself time
- Treat yourself kindly
- Reach out for support

The basics

HIV stands for Human Immuno-deficiency Virus. This virus attacks a person's immune system. If it is not treated, the virus damages the immune system making the person more vulnerable to illness.

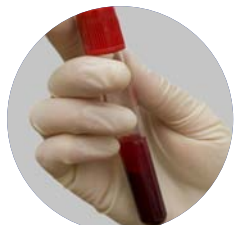
Having HIV does not mean you have AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). Rather, AIDS is a group of illnesses that can happen when the immune system is weak.

The treatments available can slow down the damage to the immune system. This means that most people who are HIV positive can live a healthy and fulfilling life.

How is HIV transmitted or passed on from one person to another?

The virus lives in certain body fluids: blood, semen, vaginal fluids and breast milk. It can be passed on through:

- Unprotected sex (sex without a condom)
- Sharing needles and other drug injecting equipment
- Mother to child during pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding
- Blood transfusion and/or blood products, in some countries. In Australia blood products have been tested for HIV since 1985.



Testing for HIV



Treatments: The basics



Looking after yourself



Pregnancy and me



NSW Services & Websites

HIV **cannot** be passed on through casual contact such as: kissing, sneezing, sharing cutlery, toilets or shower. Insects **do not** transmit HIV.

Who do I have to tell?

If you have had unprotected sex, your sexual partner/s will need to know as they may want to have an HIV test.

The law in NSW says that you must tell your sexual partner/s that you are HIV positive before you have sex, even if you use a condom.

Telling other people, family and services

Telling someone that you are HIV positive is a big step. Take your time to decide carefully who you will tell.

It might be helpful to think about how they might react: Will they be supportive, can they be trusted, will they keep the information to themselves?

Talk to a counsellor or a support worker if you want help with these difficult decisions.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality means that the information a doctor, health or HIV service has about you is private and cannot be given to anyone unless you say they can. In Australia, it is against the law to share personal information without the client's permission.

Immigration

If you are applying for a permanent visa you will be asked to have an HIV test. If you would like to know more about how HIV can affect your immigration process, contact HALC (HIV/AIDS Legal Centre) on (02) 9206 2060.

Services

Also see [NSW Services and Websites Factsheet](#)

The Heterosexual HIV/AIDS Service (Pozhet) Freecall 1800 812 404

ACON Women & Families Affected by HIV Project Ph: (02) 9699 8756

Multicultural HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C Service Ph: (02) 9515 5030

If you need an interpreter call 131 450

Further reading: follow the links or ask a support worker for a copy of these resources

Treat yourself right

www.afao.org.au/library_docs/resources/TYR_07.pdf

Songs in the blood

Personal stories from HIV positive women

www.radio.adelaide.edu.au/songsintheblood/index.html

HIV/AIDS information in different languages

www.multiculturalhivhepc.net.au

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