

Awareness about AIDS (Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome)



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What is HIV/AIDS?

HIV is a viral disease caused by Human immune deficiency virus. It is a disease which weakens our immune system or power to fight against diseases.

AIDS (Acquire Immunodeficiency Syndrome) is a relatively advanced stage of HIV infection in which power of body to fight against various other infections breaks down; therefore, the patient is susceptible to a number of infection/opportunistic infection and cancers. HIV/AIDS is not curable but it can be controlled or prevented.

1st patient of AIDS was detected in India in 1986. Now they are >5.1 lakh people infected with HIV.

How does HIV affect us?

cells). These cells normally protect us from disease. Progressive loss of a special kind of immune cell known as T helper or CD4 cells is the major mechanism of AIDS. As time goes it weakens and ultimately breaks down our immune system, leaving a person vulnerable to various opportunistic infections. If you are suffering fever of prolong duration, persistent diarrhea and unexplained progressive loss weight you should get yourself tested for HIV.

How frequent is HIV infection / AIDS?

There are now 40 million people living with HIV/AIDS worldwide.

- In India, the first case was diagnosed in 1986. Now there are >51 million people living with HIV/AIDS.

Shanti Patient Related Education And Directions (SPREAD)

An infected person carries virus in certain body fluids e.g. blood, vaginal fluid and breast milk. The virus can be transmitted only if such HIV infected

fluid enters the blood stream of another person. Figure 1 summarizes methods of transmission of HIV from persons to persons.

Fig. 1. How is human immunodeficiency virus and therefore, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) transmitted?

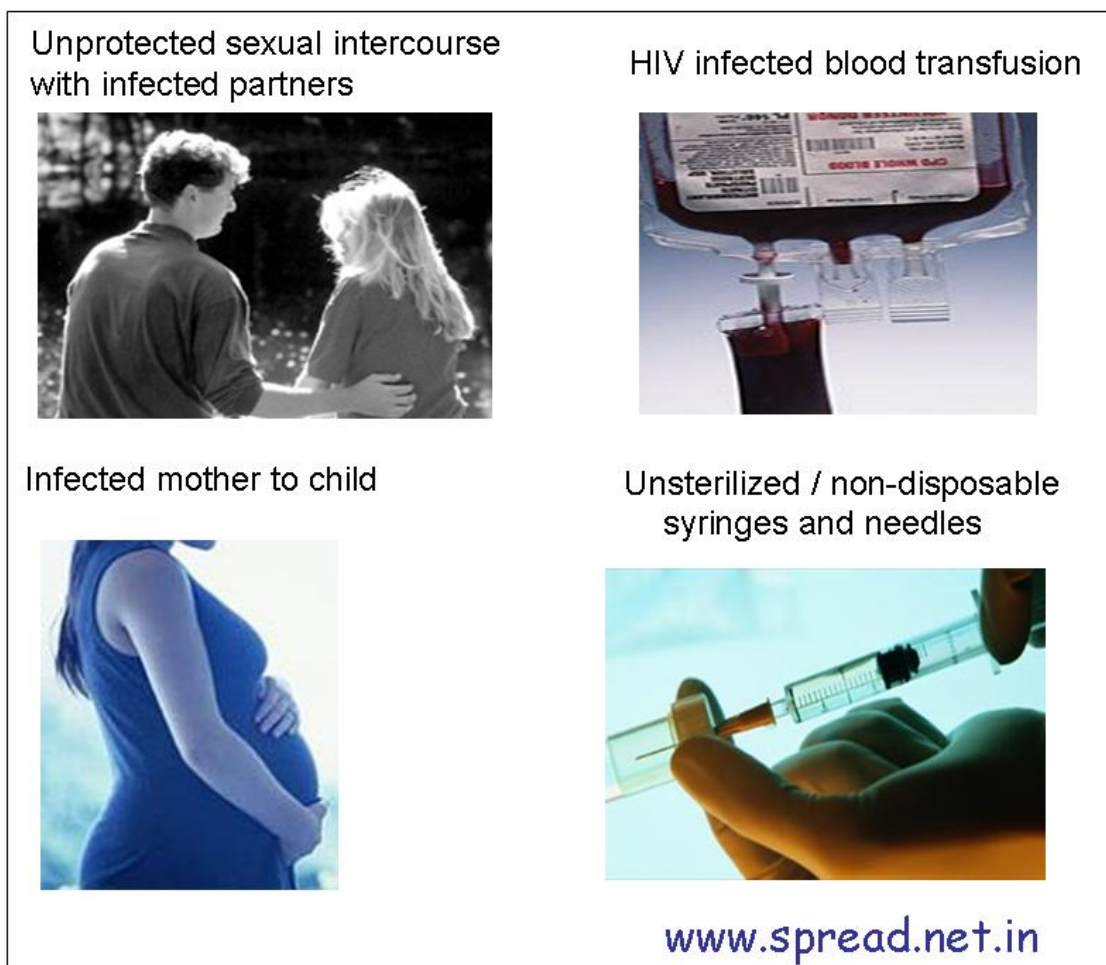


Fig. 2. Human immunodeficiency virus and therefore, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) is usually not transmitted by the followings.



How to reduce the risk of infection by HIV?

- Practicing safer sex; using condoms may be protective.
- If you are taking any injectable drugs, use only disposable syringes.
- Before using blood/blood products make sure these are HIV free.
- Take treatment timely for sexually transmitted disease.

Are some people at a greater risk of HIV infection?

Some people are at a greater risk of HIV infection.

1. Commercial sex workers and their clients.
2. Intravenous drug abusers.
3. Health care workers

When should one get his blood sample tested for HIV?

If you are suffering from following conditions, it is advisable to test yourself for HIV

- Diarrhea for a prolonged period
- Unexplained fever, particularly if not responding to usual treatment
- Tuberculosis particularly if it is not responding to treatment

If you suspect that you might be having HIV infection or you might have been exposed to HIV due to unprotected sex, infected blood/blood products, you're your blood tested for HIV because on early stage of infection one may respond better to treatment. It may give you many more years of healthy life than otherwise.

Where to go for testing for HIV?

Voluntary counselling and testing centers in district hospital and many good laboratories have facilities for testing for HIV.

Should patients with AIDS be isolated?

HIV is not an infectious disease. It does not spread by touching, coughing, sneezing, living or eating together. So these patients need not be isolated.

Treatment of AIDS

There is still no cure for HIV/AIDS but antiretroviral drugs are available which help people with HIV/AIDS live longer, healthier lives. Treatment is life long and should not be left in between because the leads to development of new viral strains, which may become resistant to drugs.