



**AIDS** is acquired immune deficiency syndrome. A person with AIDS has his or her immune system seriously weakened by a virus. The scientific term most often used for the virus is HIV, human immunodeficiency virus.

Having the virus is not the same as having AIDS. Only a person testing positive for the virus (“HIV positive” or “HIV+”) and exhibiting one or more of the associated infections is classified as having AIDS.

### How the AIDS Virus Works

The AIDS virus weakens the immune system (“immune deficiency”), allowing other infections to ravage the body. These infections are called “opportunistic” because they take advantage of the opportunity to live where the body’s immune system would normally destroy them. It’s when these opportunistic infections strike that the person is said to have AIDS.

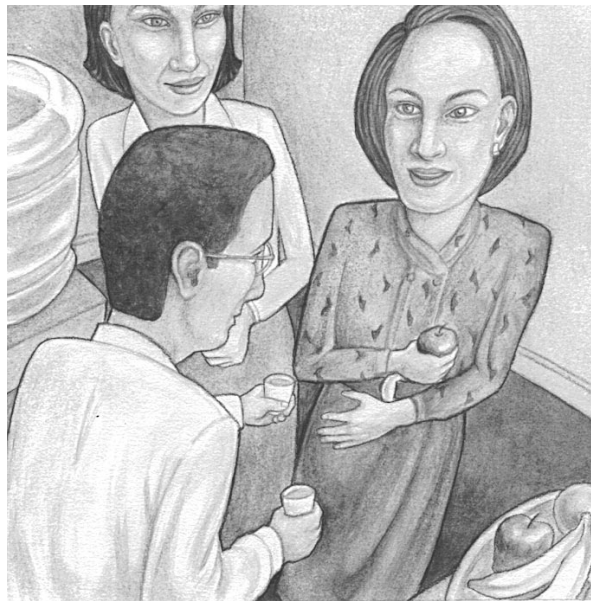
### How the AIDS Virus Is Spread

The AIDS virus is not spread through casual contact. It’s spread through direct transmission to the bloodstream during unsafe (unprotected) sexual contact, through the sharing of hypodermic needles, from tainted blood products and by an HIV+ mother to her unborn child.

You will not get AIDS in a restaurant or anywhere else unless you participate in unsafe sex or the sharing of

# AIDS ANSWERS

## Dispelling Myths



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hypodermic needles. AIDS is not a “gay disease.” In Africa, where the disease originated, most people with AIDS are heterosexual. Most of the first cases in the United States were reported among homosexual men and drug users as a result of unsafe sexual contacts or the

sharing of needles. Many of the heterosexual cases in the United States are traced to shared needles among drug users, but the incidence of AIDS among heterosexuals as a result of unsafe sexual contact is increasing.

The AIDS virus is not transmitted by kissing. This

myth began when it was reported that the AIDS virus can appear in minute quantities in the saliva and tears of people with AIDS. However (even in larger quantities), the virus can't be transmitted without a direct line to the bloodstream.

### Being Safe From AIDS

You don't know if a potential sex partner is carrying the AIDS virus. You must always use condoms and a spermicide. (Consult a healthcare worker on their proper use.) Avoid unsafe sexual practices which might cause even the slightest abrasion to the penis, vagina or rectum.

Again, there's no danger of transmission of the virus from casual contact. Donating blood is safe. Blood banks use sterile equipment and disposable needles. The HIV screening test at blood donor centers prevents the AIDS virus from being transmitted through blood or blood products. There are no reported cases of transmission of the virus from people with AIDS through the sharing of dishes, toilet facilities or the touching and affectionate contact normal among family members.

Unprotected sex between monogamous couples should occur only after both individuals have tested negative for HIV, and only when there's absolute certainty that the relationship is sexually exclusive and that drug use is not occurring.

There is no known cure for AIDS.