

The title 'HIV & AIDS' is rendered in a bold, stylized font. 'HIV' is in white with a purple outline, and '& AIDS' is in purple with a white outline. The text is set against a background of red and purple splatters, circles, and decorative flourishes. A large, faint grey graphic of a person's silhouette is visible behind the text.

HIV & AIDS

THE MYTHS & FACTS

A decorative pattern of small grey dots arranged in a grid-like fashion, fading out towards the bottom.

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How HIV Literate Are You?

Take this test and find out!

There have been many myths about HIV over the years and some are still heard today. The following tests your general knowledge about HIV and AIDS. We think you'll find it useful to try to complete this exercise on your own, before looking at the answers.

But ... if you can't wait ... check out page 4.

Myth or Fact?

Please answer TRUE or FALSE to the following statements:

1. HIV can be transmitted through mosquito (or other insect) bites.
2. HIV can be transmitted through skin to skin contact (e.g. hugging or shaking hands).
3. HIV can be transmitted through saliva (e.g. kissing, sneezing, spitting or eating utensils).
4. You can tell if someone has HIV by looking at them.
5. HIV can be cured.

6. What is "HIV"?

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7. What is "AIDS"?

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8. How many people live with HIV

in South Australia? in Australia?

How many of these don't realise they have HIV?

9. How is HIV transmitted?

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- 10. Is it illegal for people living with HIV to have sex? Why?
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- 11. Are HIV-positive people breaking the law if they don't tell you they have HIV?
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- 12. How does HIV treatment help?
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- 13. How does HIV treatment affect the risk of HIV transmission?
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- 14. Why isn't everyone with HIV on HIV treatment?
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- 15. What is the life expectancy of someone living with HIV? Why?
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- 16. How is being HIV-positive different to having any other infection?
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- 17. What is the most irrelevant question you can ask a person living with HIV?
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The Answers

Myths & Facts

1. Can HIV be transmitted through mosquito (or other insect) bites?

NO. HIV cannot be transmitted through mosquito bites. This is mainly because the mosquito delivers salivary fluid through one passage and draws blood up through another: the blood flows in one direction only. Therefore the blood from the last person the mosquito bit is not injected into the next person it bites.

2. Can HIV be transmitted through skin to skin contact (e.g. hugging, or shaking hands)?

NO. HIV cannot be transmitted through these types of skin to skin contact, or any other normal social interaction. HIV cannot pass through healthy, unbroken skin.

3. Can HIV be transmitted through saliva (e.g. kissing, sneezing, spitting or eating utensils)?

NO. There are no recorded cases anywhere in the world of HIV being transmitted through saliva, unless there is also a large amount of blood present. HIV also cannot be transmitted through the air.

4. Can you tell if someone has HIV by looking at them?

NO. Basing judgment of a person's HIV status on physical appearance is very likely to be incorrect. Whilst the majority of people with HIV in SA are gay men, many heterosexual men, many women and a few children also have HIV. People with HIV come from a wide variety of professions and cultural backgrounds, and many are parents and grandparents.

5. Can HIV be cured?

NO. Currently there's no cure or vaccination for HIV. There has been, and continues to be, lots of research into possible cures. Current treatments mean that many people with HIV are living long and healthy lives, but they do not cure HIV.

6. What is “HIV”?

HIV stands for *Human Immunodeficiency Virus*. This virus was identified in the 1980's and belongs to a group of viruses called *retroviruses*. This virus can be detected by an *HIV test*, and can be passed on to others. HIV attacks the immune system (the body's system that fights diseases) and gradually causes damage throughout the body.

7. What is “AIDS”?

AIDS stands for *Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome*. AIDS is caused by HIV. You can't develop AIDS without first having HIV, therefore you can't *catch* AIDS and there is no *AIDS test*. AIDS is the name used to describe a collection of potentially life-threatening infections and diseases, which can develop when someone's immune system has been weakened by HIV (e.g. particular forms of pneumonia or skin cancer). With modern HIV treatment, few people in Australia end up progressing to AIDS. For those who do, it is usually because they are not on HIV treatment at the time. In most cases, commencing treatment leads to recovery from AIDS.

8. How many people live with HIV - in South Australia? Australia? How many of these don't realise they have HIV?

It is estimated that in December 2013:

- 900 - 1,300 people were living with HIV in SA.
- 24,500 - 30,900 people were living with HIV in Australia.

There are approximately 1,000 - 1,200 new HIV diagnoses in Australia each year – including people of all ages. It has been estimated that approximately 14% of HIV-positive people in Australia have not been tested and therefore don't know they have HIV.

9. How is HIV transmitted?

Only 5 types of body fluids can contain enough HIV to infect someone: blood, semen, rectal fluids, vaginal fluids and breast milk. The main ways HIV can be passed on to someone else are:

- during unprotected anal and vaginal sex,
- by sharing injecting equipment, and
- from a mother to her baby during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding.

This highlights the importance of using risk reduction strategies during sex (e.g. male or female condoms and lubricant), injecting drug use (e.g. clean injecting equipment) or pregnancy (e.g. HIV treatment).

10. Is it illegal for people living with HIV to have sex? Why?

NO. It is not illegal for people living with HIV to have sex in Australia. Under South Australian law, everyone shares responsibility for their own sexual health – whether or not they have HIV, or any other sexually transmissible infection. This is important, because it is estimated that about 1/3 of all new infections in Australia are transmitted via the 14% of HIV-positive people who haven't been tested and don't yet know they have HIV. In SA, people with HIV are responsible for taking all *reasonable precautions* against HIV transmission when they have sex with someone. NOTE that the laws about HIV and sex are different in each Australian state and territory.

11. Are HIV-positive people breaking the law if they don't tell you they have HIV?

There are very few situations in which people are legally required to disclose their HIV status. Given the limited ways in which HIV can be transmitted, there is no risk of HIV infection in the course of ordinary daily living and interaction. It is easy for everyone to take responsibility for their own HIV prevention – and these methods have the added benefit of also protecting you from other sexually transmissible infections and blood-borne viruses.

12. How does HIV treatment help?

HIV treatment involves taking a combination of anti-HIV drugs. This is called *antiretroviral therapy*, or ART. These powerful medications stop the virus from reproducing and allow the immune system to strengthen and fight infections effectively. This significantly improves the long term health of most HIV-positive people.

13. How does HIV treatment affect the risk of HIV transmission?

Viral load is the term used to describe the amount of HIV in blood. Once the level is very low, a *standard* test can no longer reliably detect HIV. This is called having an *undetectable viral load* (UVL). The aim of HIV treatment is to reach and maintain an UVL. Having an UVL significantly reduces the risk of HIV transmission.

14. Why isn't everyone with HIV on HIV treatment?

ART is available to everyone with HIV in SA. However, beginning HIV treatment is a big decision: once someone starts, it's recommended that they take the drugs every day for the rest of their life. (If someone stops taking ART, it stops working.) For some people, this means living with ongoing side effects or the risk of side effects developing (though these are less likely with the newer HIV treatments). Taking regular medication may put people at risk of being 'outed' as HIV-positive: some people may not be willing to take this risk as it could threaten their wellbeing (e.g. discrimination at work, or family violence). For everyone with HIV, taking ART is a major life-long financial, practical and emotional commitment. And, we still don't fully understand the long term effects of ART.

15. What is the life expectancy of someone living with HIV? Why?

Without treatment, people with HIV will almost always become ill, and their lives may be shortened. With modern HIV treatment, many people with HIV are living long and healthy lives. In fact, doctors predict that most people with HIV will live as long as HIV-negative people of a similar age.

16. How is being HIV-positive different to having any other infection?

Despite HIV being less easy to get than many other infections, the social differences are enormous! There has been much fear and hysteria about HIV and a long history of maltreatment of people living with HIV. Even today, there is still discrimination toward HIV-positive people in health care, employment, access to housing, the law, and even when commencing relationships. This is why many HIV-positive people choose to keep their HIV status private – even from their friends, family or community.

17. What is the most irrelevant question you can ask a person living with HIV?

It is not appropriate to ask someone *How did you get HIV?* Ask yourself *Why do you want to know? How would it change your relationship with the person?* Many HIV-positive people are justifiably concerned that disclosing how they became HIV-positive may lead to negative reactions from people they know, or further discrimination in society more widely.

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For More Information ...

IMPORTANT NOTE: Do not rely on information about the legalities of HIV from outside South Australia. Laws that refer to HIV differ from state to state within Australia, and from country to country around the world.

www.hivsa.org.au - Positive Life SA is the only service driven by HIV-positive people, for HIV-positive people, in SA. This website includes information about the realities of living with HIV in SA; links to state and national HIV resources; and more about our programs and services.

www.sahealth.sa.gov.au – The SA Health webpage on HIV (Google search “SA Health HIV”) is a useful source on the medical aspects of HIV – signs/symptoms, diagnosis, incubation period, infectiousness, etc.

kirby.unsw.edu.au/surveillance/Annual-Surveillance-Reports – Each year since 1997, The Kirby Institute has produced a report detailing diagnoses for HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmissible infections in Australia. This is the authoritative source on the epidemiology of HIV in Australia.

halc.org.au – The HIV/AIDS Legal Centre (HALC) in Sydney has produced a series of (very readable) guides on HIV and the law, covering areas such as disclosure (in different Australian states), employment, superannuation, criminalisation, migration and travel.

www.aidsmap.com - This United Kingdom site is an independent, clear and accurate source of detailed information about HIV and AIDS. The site includes substantial resources (www.aidsmap.com/resources), including over 100 very practical and accessible fact sheets (www.aidsmap.com/factsheets).

www.catie.ca – This Canadian site is another useful source of HIV information, including good quality information about the impact of HIV on women.

www.thewellproject.org/hiv-information - The Well Project aims to inform, support, and advocate for women and girls affected by HIV throughout the world. Worldwide, women and girls form the majority of people living with HIV, however limited resources have focused on their particular issues and needs. (NOTE that approximately 10% of the people living with HIV in Australia are women.)

www.thebody.com and www.poz.com – These United States sites are targeted at HIV-positive people. Both include factual HIV information, and provide an opportunity to view HIV through the eyes of people living with HIV.



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f: www.facebook.com/positivelifesa

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