



HIV? AIDS?

**WHAT
IS IT ALL
ABOUT?**

FAQ

**WANT TO KNOW MORE
ABOUT HIV AND AIDS?
GOT DOUBTS OR QUESTIONS?
THIS BROCHURE IS FOR YOU!**



Online forums often contain misinformation, any many questions posted there are rarely answered accurately.

Over the past several decades of the epidemic, we have learned all the routes of transmission. Effective treatment is now available, preventing the development of AIDS. Despite this, many myths surrounding this topic still persist.

They continue to cause confusion and fear, even in everyday interactions with other people. For example, some people still believe that HIV can be transmitted through a mosquito bite. 😊



This brochure grew out of real conversations and meetings between staff at the National AIDS Centre and young people.

It's designed as a Q&A, and even though many years have passed, those questions remain relevant.

"HIV?! AIDS?! WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT?" explains the basics of HIV/AIDS, provides information about the routes of infection, and addresses common misconceptions about staying safe in everyday situations.

The brochure also provides important information on how to minimise the risk of HIV infection and what to do if you think you may have been exposed to the virus.

**READ ON AND GET THE
FACTS - SO YOU KNOW
WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT!**





guest

~Anonymous

8 November, 7:42 pm

WHY SHOULD I BOTHER LEARNING ABOUT HIV AND AIDS?



Lublin
expert

~Miroslaw – HIV/AIDS counsellor

8 November, 7:56 pm

Doesn't matter how old you are, whether you're a guy or a girl, whether you're from the city or a village, what religion you confess or what you think about HIV and AIDS – none of that changes the fact that you could be at risk.



Warsaw

Olka_WAW99

8 November, 7:57 pm

HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF FROM GETTING INFECTED?



Lublin
expert

~Miroslaw – HIV/AIDS counsellor

8 November, 8:00 pm

Most often, people become infected when they engage in high-risk behaviours, often because they either didn't know how the virus spreads or they ignored the risks. By putting the information given in this brochure into practice in your daily life, you can significantly reduce your risk of becoming infected.



Warsaw

Olka_WAW99

8 November, 8:02 pm

WHAT ACTUALLY IS HIV?



Gdańsk
educator

~Katarzyna – HIV/AIDS educator

8 November, 8:06 pm

HIV stands for **the Human Immunodeficiency Virus**. HIV attacks your immune system, which normally protects you from infections and diseases. Once that protection is weakened or destroyed, a person infected with HIV becomes vulnerable to various illnesses that can be life-threatening.

There is still no vaccine to prevent HIV, and there is currently no cure that can fully eliminate the virus from the body. However, effective medication allows HIV-infected people to lead a normal life. Still, we need to keep in mind that without treatment, HIV may progress to AIDS, which is a fatal disease. 😞

Although HIV is very dangerous to people, it doesn't survive outside the human body. The virus is fragile and is easily inactivated by disinfectants, including those containing chlorine. It's also destroyed by water, soap and heat (exposure to just 56°C for thirty minutes is sufficient to destroy the virus)! 😊



Warsaw

Olka _WAW99

8 November, 8:10 pm

AND WHAT IS AIDS, THEN?



Lublin
expert

~Miroslaw – HIV/AIDS counsellor

8 November, 8:14 pm

AIDS is the final stage of HIV infection. The full name of AIDS is **Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome**. What you should remember about it is that AIDS is a condition in which the immune system of a HIV-infected person gives up and can no longer defend the body against bacteria and viruses. AIDS usually develops many years after HIV infection. During this time, a person may have no symptoms or feel any discomfort.

Thanks to modern medicine, fewer people are progressing to AIDS these days. In Poland, access to treatment isn't an issue - anyone who needs antiretroviral therapy (ARV), gets it. The Government Health Policy Programme for Antiretroviral Treatment (RPLA) covers all people living with HIV or AIDS in Poland, regardless of their insurance status, including pregnant women with HIV and newborns born to HIV-positive mothers.

Early detection of infection (taking an HIV test) and taking antiretroviral medicines every day is what keeps AIDS from developing.

One more thing worth knowing: effective treatment can bring the amount of virus in the blood to an undetectable level. At that point, an HIV-positive person can't pass HIV on through sex without a condom (following the **U = U principle: Undetectable = Untransmittable**). However, it won't protect the person against other sexually transmitted infections...



Białystok

Ja_Kuba

8 November, 8:16 pm

HOW DOES SOMEONE ACTUALLY GET INFECTED WITH HIV?



Lublin
expert

~Mirośław – HIV/AIDS counsellor

8 November, 8:27 pm

HIV only passes from person to person. Infection happens when body fluids carrying the virus, such as:

- **blood, or any secretion with a visible trace of blood (e.g. saliva with blood, vomit mixed with blood),**
- **semen (including pre-ejaculate), vaginal fluids,**
- **breast milk from a mother living with HIV**

get into another person's body through broken skin or mucous membranes (e.g. of the eye, mouth, genitals, anus, and so on).



Warsaw

Olka _WAW99

8 November, 8:31 pm

SO HOW DOES HIV PASS FROM ONE PERSON TO ANOTHER?



Lublin
expert

~Mirośław – HIV/AIDS counsellor

8 November, 8:33 pm

There are three routes of HIV infection:

- through contact with the blood of a person living with HIV, e.g. accidental prick from a contaminated needle,
- during sexual contact without a condom (vaginal, oral, or anal) with a person living with the virus,
- mother-to-child transmission during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding.



Poznań

Ewcia I 5

8 November, 8:35 pm

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I'VE JUST BEEN IN A RISKY SITUATION – SAY, PRICKED BY A NEEDLE OF UNKNOWN ORIGIN, EXPOSED TO THE BLOOD OF A PERSON LIVING WITH HIV, OR HAD UNPROTECTED SEX WITH AN HIV-POSITIVE PERSON?



Gdańsk
educator

~Katarzyna – HIV/AIDS educator

8 November, 8:42 pm

HIV infection can be prevented!

If you think you have been exposed to HIV, you should **immediately** go to the nearest isolation hospital that provides HIV care . A list of treatment centres is available on the National AIDS Centre website (see the QR code). There, a healthcare professional will determine whether you should receive post-exposure antiretroviral medicines (the ones used to treat HIV patients).

The sooner the medication is taken (ideally within 2–3 hours of the exposure), the greater the chance of completely removing the virus from the body and avoiding infection. Treatment is most effective when it's started no later than 48 hours after the exposure.





Warsaw

Olka_WAW99

8 November, 8:45 pm

OK, SO HOW CAN'T YOU GET HIV?



Lublin
expert

~Miroslaw – HIV/AIDS counsellor

8 November, 8:51 pm

Ola, you can't get HIV:

- **by living under one roof or studying together with an HIV-positive person, as long as you keep to basic hygiene rules,**
- **by sharing plates, glasses, or cutlery,**
- **by using the same bathroom (just remember to use your own toothbrush and razor),**
- **by using the same toilet,**
- **by practising sports, e.g. at the swimming pool,**
- **through a sneeze.**



Poznań

Ewcia15

8 November, 8:53 pm

HOW CAN I AVOID HIV INFECTION? ARE THERE RISKY SITUATIONS IN EVERYDAY LIFE?



Gdańsk
educator

~Katarzyna – HIV/AIDS educator

8 November, 8:58 pm

The risk comes from broken skin or mucous membranes coming into contact with infected body fluids, e.g. another person's blood. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- **Be careful when someone gets cut - try to avoid contact with the blood (and if you do, put on disposable gloves), or find someone who is trained to help, e.g. a nurse.**
- **Have cosmetic treatments and tattoos done only by qualified professionals in trusted places. Ask whether the tools being used are sterile. If it turns out they aren't, give up on the procedure!**
- **Don't share razors, toothbrushes, or other personal-care items.**



Białystok

Ja_Kuba

8 November, 8:59 pm

CAN YOU GET HIV DURING A HOSPITAL VISIT?



Lublin
expert

~Mirośław – HIV/AIDS counsellor

8 November, 9:00 pm

In Poland, medical equipment is sterilised, and all donated blood for transfusion is tested for HIV and hepatitis viruses (infectious hepatitis type B – HBV and type C – HCV). All needles and syringes used in hospitals and clinics are single-use only. Every patient should be attended to with a fresh pair of disposable gloves. That's the standard! 😊

ASK!
IF ANYTHING SEEMS OFF
DURING A VISIT TO A CLINIC
OR HOSPITAL.

SPEAK UP!
IF YOU NOTICE THAT
SOMETHING IS WRONG.



Białystok

Ja_Kuba

8 November, 9:03 pm

DO MOSQUITOES SPREAD HIV???



Gdańsk
educator

~Katarzyna – HIV/AIDS educator

8 November, 9:05 pm

**No, you can't get HIV from a mosquito bite,
from squashing a mosquito on your skin,
or even from swallowing one. 😊**

**You also don't need to be afraid of being bitten by
animals – they don't transmit HIV.**

Inside a mosquito's body, HIV is destroyed (digested), so it can't multiply or get into the mosquito's saliva that gets injected into the human body during the bite. Also, mosquitoes use two separate channels – one to inject their saliva, the other one to draw blood. The break in the skin at the spot of the bite doesn't increase the risks.



Warsaw

Olka_WAW99

8 November, 9:08 pm

WHAT'S SAFE AND WHAT'S NOT WHEN IT COMES TO PHYSICAL CLOSENESS?



Gdańsk
educator

~Katarzyna – HIV/AIDS educator

8 November, 9:12 pm

Hugging is safe. So is holding hands or stroking. You also don't need to worry about kisses – saliva doesn't carry the virus!

Nobody engages in sexual activity with the intention of getting HIV, but that's how most infections actually happen. The risk of HIV infection is just one of many reasons to think carefully before deciding to have sex. Ask yourself whether **the time is right**, or whether it might be better to wait.

Don't let anyone pressure you into having sex, and don't let anyone else make that decision for you.

If you decide you're ready to have sex, it's a good idea for both partners to get tested beforehand so you both know each other's HIV status. Honesty and trust are important.



Lublin
expert

~Mirośław – HIV/AIDS counsellor

8 November, 9:14 pm

Think your decision through carefully. Remember that having vaginal, oral, or anal sex without a condom carries a **risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs)**. Birth control pills help prevent pregnancy, but they do not protect against infections.

Condoms have proven to be highly effective at reducing the risk of HIV and other STIs when you follow certain rules. Use a good quality condom, put it on correctly, keep it on throughout the intercourse, and make sure it doesn't tear or slip off.

And no - wearing two condoms at the same time doesn't provide extra protection. In fact, it can make them less effective.



Warsaw

Olka _WAW99

8 November, 9:20 pm

DOES DRINKING ALCOHOL OR USING DRUGS OR OTHER PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES RAISE YOUR RISK OF GETTING HIV?



Gdańsk
educator

~Katarzyna – HIV/AIDS educator

8 November, 9:27 pm

It's best not to use such substances at all. Alcohol and other mind-altering substances significantly raise your risk of infection. They can make you lose control over your body and your behaviour. You can also become a victim of a crime that puts you at risk of HIV or other sexually transmitted infections.

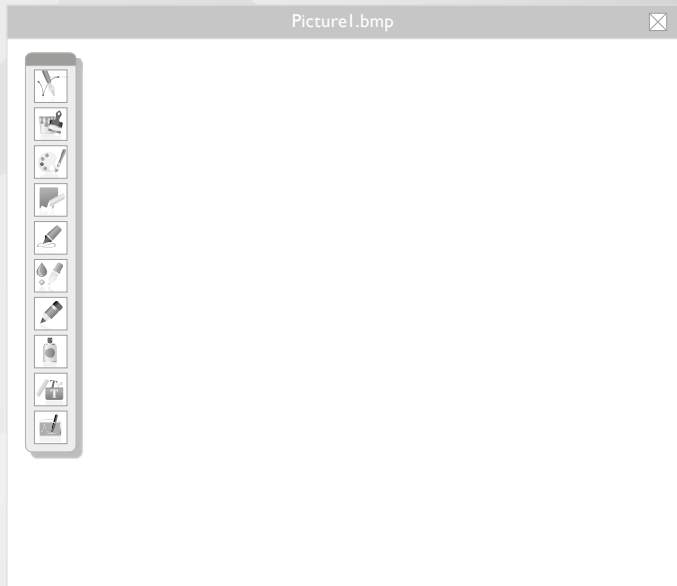
Do you enjoy going to clubs or parties? Keep an eye on your drink at all times. You decide what you drink and how much. Stay alert and never leave your drink unattended, as someone could slip something into your drink.

Sharing needles, syringes or other drug-injecting equipment is a direct route of HIV transmission. Avoid sharing drug-use equipment!

WHAT DOES A PERSON LIVING WITH HIV LOOK LIKE?

If you think there is a “typical look” that makes you realise you are dealing with a person living with HIV, try drawing or describing such a person below.

See the next page to check if you got it right.





Warsaw

Olka _WAW99

8 November, 9:30 pm

WHAT'S THE CORRECT ANSWER?



Lublin
expert

~Mirośław – HIV/AIDS counsellor

8 November, 9:32 pm

A PERSON LIVING WITH HIV CAN LOOK EXACTLY LIKE YOU!

Looking healthy doesn't mean someone's free of HIV or other viruses, while looking sick doesn't mean someone is infected with HIV or AIDS.

You already know that AIDS is the final stage of HIV infection. It is true that some illnesses associated with AIDS can change a person's appearance. However, it can take many years for HIV to progress to AIDS and for these illnesses to develop. During this time, an infected person may look and feel completely healthy. Many HIV-positive people are unaware of their infection until symptoms of the AIDS-associated disease appear. Until they become aware of their condition, they may unknowingly pass the virus on to others.



Poznań

Ewcia15

8 November, 9:37 pm

HOW CAN I CHECK WHETHER I HAVE HIV?



Lublin
expert

~Mirośław – HIV/AIDS counsellor

8 November, 9:40 pm

The only way to know your HIV status for sure is to get tested. The test requires only a small blood sample, and you don't even need to fast beforehand!

To rule out HIV infection, you should take the test at least 6 weeks after the possible exposure.



HIV testing is **free, anonymous and does not require a referral**. Tests are available at counselling and diagnostic centres. Every centre offers counselling before and after the test. A full list of locations is available at: aids.gov.pl (scan the QR code).

Please note that if you are under 16, you need the consent of a parent or legal guardian to take an HIV test. If you are aged 16-18, both you and your parent or guardian must give consent. Once you are 18, you can take the test without parental consent.

Other ways to find out your HIV status include:

- **taking part in testing campaigns, for example during community health events,**
- **using a home HIV test kit purchased from a pharmacy,**
- **having an HIV test ordered by your primary care doctor,**
- **getting tested at a private laboratory.**



Katowice

Tomaszek

8 November, 21:43

**WHICH PHRASE
SHOULD I USE:
BECOMING INFECTED
OR CATCHING HIV?**



Lublin
expert

~Mirośław – HIV/AIDS counsellor

8 November, 9:49 pm

We always use the phrase **“getting infected”** in relation to HIV.

This virus is passed in three ways: through unprotected sexual contact, through blood, and from an infected mother to her child (vertically).

You can only **“catch”** airborne viruses (by sneezing or coughing), such as the flu virus or the coronavirus.



guest

~Anonymous

8 November, 9:46 pm

CAN AN HIV-POSITIVE PERSON HAVE A HEALTHY CHILD?



Gdańsk
educator

~Katarzyna – HIV/AIDS educator

8 November, 9:50 pm

Yes. If a woman knows she's HIV-positive and receives appropriate care during pregnancy - from both an obstetrician-gynaecologist and an infectious diseases specialist experienced in treating people living with HIV - the chance of having a healthy baby is over 99%.

However, if a mother-to-be does not get tested and does not know that she has HIV, she may pass the virus on to her baby.

The father-to-be should also consider getting an HIV test.

**HIV
test**

aids.gov.pl



free of charge



no referral needed



anonymous



Katowice

Tomaszek

8 November, 9:51 pm

WHAT DOES THE RED RIBBON SYMBOLISE?



Gdańsk
educator

~Katarzyna – HIV/AIDS educator

8 November, 9:57 PM

The red ribbon is a symbol of solidarity with people living with HIV or AIDS, and with their families and friends. The symbol was designed in the 1980s at the height of the epidemic in the USA. Red represents blood and love, and the shape of the ribbon – the upside-down “V” (which stands for victory) – is a reminder that the fight against the virus isn’t over yet. People who want to show support for those living with HIV/AIDS pin on a red ribbon every year on the 1st of December, World AIDS Day, and on the Day of Remembrance for those who died of AIDS (the third Sunday of May).

Want to get involved in this event? You don’t have to limit yourself to simply wearing a ribbon! You could organise an HIV/AIDS quiz at your school, host a film screening on the topic, or invite an HIV/AIDS educator or a person living with HIV, to give a talk.

**If you have questions, doubts or worries
about HIV or AIDS, you can use:**

the HIV/AIDS Helpline:

800 888 448 (free call)

the HIV/AIDS Online Advice Service:

aids.gov.pl/pi



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