



What's next?

I am HIV positive.

**What should I
do next?**

**YOUR HIV TEST RESULT CAME BACK POSITIVE (+),
WHICH MEANS YOU HAVE BEEN INFECTED WITH HIV.
YOU ARE PROBABLY WONDERING WHAT YOU SHOULD DO NEXT**

First of all, take some time to calmly read the information provided here – it may help you come to terms with this news and guide you on the next steps to take.

If you see an HIV specialist and start treatment as soon as possible, you can live with HIV for many years and enjoy a full life. Today, there are numerous antiretroviral medications that suppress HIV replication. If you start treatment at the right time and take your medication regularly, you can live just as long as people who are HIV-negative.

If you do not go to a clinic and see a doctor specializing in HIV care, over time – usually 7–10 years after infection – AIDS may develop. AIDS is a condition caused by untreated HIV and can seriously threaten health and life.

The decision is up to you – consider whether it is worth taking advantage of the opportunities offered by modern treatment.

REMEMBER!

AN HIV INFECTION CAN ONLY BE CONFIRMED WHEN THE RESULT OF A CONFIRMATORY TEST (PCR OR WESTERN BLOT) IS POSITIVE (ALSO REFERRED TO AS: REACTIVE OR POSITIVE).

If you have only taken a screening test, e.g. ELISA (this also applies to rapid self-tests), a positive result does not necessarily mean that you have been infected with HIV.

TO CONFIRM HIV INFECTION, IT IS NECESSARY TO PERFORM A CONFIRMATORY TEST.

What should you do first?

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The most important step is to register at a clinic that treats people living with HIV – a referral is not required. You can find the current list of clinics on the website of the National AIDS Center (aids.gov.pl).



During your first visit, the doctor will take a detailed medical history, perform an examination, and order other blood tests. They need to assess your overall health, identify any other medical conditions, check your immune system (CD4 cell count), determine your **viral load (the amount of virus in your blood)**, and learn about your treatment preferences.

Based on this information, the doctor will decide which therapy is best for you. Treatment usually involves taking one pill per day. Some people may also benefit from injectable therapy, which involves receiving injections every few months. It's best to discuss treatment options with your physician.

CURRENTLY, THERE ARE NO MEDICATIONS THAT CAN COMPLETELY ELIMINATE HIV FROM THE HUMAN BODY, BUT AVAILABLE THERAPIES ARE HIGHLY EFFECTIVE AT SUPPRESSING VIRAL REPLICATION IF TAKEN REGULARLY.

It is important to remember that treatment **must not be discontinued.** With proper therapy, the viral load becomes undetectable. However, this does not mean the virus is gone from the body – if you stop taking your medication, HIV will start replicating again.

Do I have to inform anyone about my infection?

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A PERSON LIVING WITH HIV SHOULD, IN PRINCIPLE, INFORM THEIR CURRENT SEXUAL PARTNER ABOUT THEIR INFECTION.

If you don't know how to tell them, talk to your doctor. They will definitely be able to help you. In some HIV care centers, psychologists are also available, and at counseling and diagnostic points, HIV/AIDS advisors can support you during this difficult moment.

Of course, **no one can tell others about your infection without your consent** (exceptions to this rule are defined by law). If you wish, a doctor, psychologist, or HIV/AIDS advisor can be present during such a conversation. This may make it easier for you to share information about your infection.

You are not required to inform previous sexual partners about your infection. However, it may be worth at least encouraging them to get tested for HIV. After all, that's how you became infected. If that person doesn't know about their infection, they could, first of all, transmit it to others (if they have unprotected sex or share injection equipment), and second, without treatment, they lose the opportunity to maintain their health.

Think about if and when you want to tell your family, friends, or coworkers about your infection. People's reactions can vary, although they are often better than you might expect. It's best not to act hastily in this matter.

You are not required to inform your primary care doctor, dentist, gynecologist, or even a surgeon before an operation. However, consider whether it might be helpful to do so. What happens with your health could be related to HIV infection, so sharing this information may make it easier to get an accurate diagnosis and allow for proper treatment.

It is also advisable that the anesthesiologist knows which medications you are taking during a procedure, as they may interact with anesthetic drugs. Doctors and medical staff are obligated to maintain medical confidentiality.

There may be situations in which you should consider informing others about your infection (e.g., if others are exposed to your blood). Sharing this information can influence the decision to initiate post-exposure prophylaxis for the exposed person, helping to prevent their infection.

**ALSO REMEMBER THAT KNOWINGLY EXPOSING OTHERS TO HIV
IS A CRIME AND CAN RESULT IN LEGAL LIABILITY¹.**

Will my life change?

A little bit.

First – **you will start taking medication** (but people with high blood pressure, diabetes, or any other chronic illness also need to take medications).

Second – as long **as the virus is detectable in your blood** at a level above 200 copies/ml for less than six months, **you must use a condom during all sexual contact**. If you use psychoactive substances or anabolic drugs, always use your own single-use injection equipment (regardless of your viral load). After using it, do not give needles or syringes to others. Make sure they are safely disposed of.

Other aspects of your life will not change. You can perform almost any job², eat normally, play sports, travel³, and even have healthy, HIV-negative children⁴.

**REMEMBER THE PRINCIPLE U = U,
WHICH MEANS
UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE.**

With antiretroviral treatment, the level of the virus in your blood decreases. If your viral load stays below 200 copies/ml for at least six months and you continue taking your medication regularly, there will be no risk of transmitting HIV to others through sexual contact.

Until your viral load becomes undetectable, always use a condom. When used correctly throughout sexual contact, a condom not only prevents the transmission of HIV to others but also eliminates the risk of other sexually transmitted infections (e.g., syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia).

Remember that even if your viral load is undetectable, you cannot donate blood. Your sexual partners should be aware of your HIV infection.

DURING SEXUAL CONTACT WITH AN HIV-NEGATIVE PERSON, THE CONDOM BROKE. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

First, inform your partner about your infection (if you haven't done so already).

If your viral load is undetectable and you take your medication regularly, there is no risk of transmitting HIV to your partner. However, if your viral load is above 200 copies/ml, your partner should go to a clinic or hospital, where a doctor will assess whether they should receive post-exposure prophylaxis.

Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) involves taking antiretroviral medications (usually different from those taken by the person living with HIV with whom exposure occurred). In this situation, time is critical – **if the medication is started within a few hours (maximum 48 hours) after exposure, the risk of infection is greatly reduced.**

The final decision on whether to administer PEP to the person exposed to the virus is made by a doctor.

A list of facilities offering this prophylaxis can be found at <https://aids.gov.pl/co-robic/>.



Treatment for people with HIV

– do I have to pay for doctor visits or medication?

ARV medications are free-of-charge, regardless of the patient's insurance status. You will receive them on-site – at the clinic or hospital pharmacy. Therefore, you do not need to go to public pharmacies (and you do not need to worry about anyone finding out about your HIV infection).

Whether you have to pay for doctor visits or diagnostic tests at an HIV treatment clinic depends on the specific medical facility providing and billing for the service – some require insurance with the National Health Fund (NFZ).

If you do not have NFZ insurance, contact your local labor office, social welfare center, or the National Health Fund. Their staff can help you obtain access to healthcare services or get insured, allowing you to visit a doctor without any obstacles.

What about the side effects of antiretroviral medications?

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HIV medications, like all other medicines, can have side effects. Currently used drugs are effective, safe, and very well tolerated. Additionally, research is continually being conducted on new, even safer medications.

The choice of medication is made by your doctor – however, if side effects occur, talk to them about it; it is always possible to switch to other drugs that are better tolerated.

Never stop taking your medication on your own!

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The effectiveness of treatment (i.e., the reduction of virus copies in the blood and the increase in CD4 lymphocytes) **depends on the regularity of taking your medication** (adherence). Taking your medication daily and consistently will improve your health. Irregular use or stopping medication can make the therapy ineffective, potentially leading to the development of AIDS. Additionally, drug resistance may occur – the virus can become resistant to the medications you have been taking.

This may force a change in treatment, and because there isn't an unlimited number of medications, at some point there may no longer be a drug that could help you.

I can't come to terms with having HIV.

Does any of this still make sense?

A diagnosis of HIV gives you a chance for a long and good life. Knowing about your infection gives you the opportunity to use existing therapy and the chance to protect the people closest to you.

But if you are feeling sadness, anger, general apathy, or indifference to life, consider whether it might be helpful to see a psychologist or psychiatrist. Even with effective treatment that allows a person with HIV to live a long and normal life, you may find it hard to adjust to this new situation – this is a common reaction to stress. You don't have to face it alone. Allow yourself to process and release these difficult emotions.

In some clinics in Poland, psychologists who regularly work with people living with HIV are available, which can make it easier to talk with them. There are also many non-governmental organizations that support people living with HIV and can help you address challenges related to your diagnosis.

You can also use the free **HIV/AIDS Helpline** and the **HIV/AIDS Online Clinic**. Consultants there can help you navigate this new and challenging situation and answer any questions you may have.

HIV/AIDS Helpline: 800 888 448
HIV/AIDS Online Clinic: aids.gov.pl/pi



1. Act of June 6, 1997 – Penal Code (Journal of Laws 2025, item 383), Article 161 § 1:
“Anyone who, knowing that they are infected with the HIV virus or suffering from a venereal or contagious disease, a serious incurable illness, or a life-threatening condition, directly exposes another person to infection with this virus or disease, shall be subject to imprisonment from 3 months to 5 years”.
2. Restrictions mainly concern professional soldiers and uniformed service officers, where HIV tests are or may be conducted as part of basic (entry, periodic) and control medical examinations. However, in many situations, detection of HIV does not automatically result in being declared unfit for service – the decisive factors are the type of service and the individual's health condition.
3. Travel and stays abroad:
 - short-term tourist stays (less than 3 months) are very rarely restricted for people living with HIV.
 - longer stays (related to education, work, or immigration) may face restrictions slightly more often, but fortunately this concerns only a small number of countries.
 - up-to-date information should be obtained or confirmed at the embassy of the country you plan to visit.
4. If you are planning to have children, consult the doctor who manages your HIV therapy.

HIV/AIDS Online Clinic: aids.gov.pl/pi

HIV/AIDS Helpline: **800 888 448**

(call free of charge)

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