**What is HIV**

* HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is the virus that can lead to AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome).
* You can have HIV and Not know it .

**How is HIV Spread?**

* HIV is a virus spread through certain body fluids that attacks the body’s immune system, specifically the CD4 cells, often called T cells. Over time, HIV can destroy so many of these cells that the body can’t fight off infections. These special cells help the immune system fight off infections.
* If untreated HIV reduces the immune system making it harder and harder for the body to fight off infections and some other diseases. Some infections or cancers take advantage of a very weak immune system and signal that the person has AIDS.

**How do I know if I have HIV**

* The only way to know for sure whether you have HIV is to get tested. Knowing your status is important because it helps you make healthy decisions to prevent contracting or transmitting HIV.
* Some people may experience a flu-like illness within 2 to 4 weeks after infection (Stage 1 HIV infection). But some people may not feel sick during this stage. Flu-like symptoms include fever, chills, rash, night sweats, muscle aches, sore throat, fatigue, swollen lymph nodes, or mouth ulcers.
* These symptoms can last anywhere from a few days to several weeks. During this time, HIV infection may not show up on an HIV test, but people who have it are highly infectious and can spread the infection to others.
* If you have these symptoms, that doesn’t mean you have HIV. Each of these symptoms can be caused by other illnesses. But if you have these symptoms after a potential exposure to HIV, see a health care provider and tell them about your risk.
* The only way to determine whether you are infected is to be tested for HIV infection.

**How is HIV transmitted?**

* Through *unprotected* sex with someone who has HIV. Your Sex partner can have HIV and not know it .
* By *sharing needles or syringes*, that have already been used by someone who has HIV
* Women with HIV can pass the virus to their babies during *pregnancy, delivery, or breastfeeding.*

**You can get or transmit HIV only through specific activities. Most commonly, people get or transmit HIV through sexual behaviors and needle or syringe use.**

**How can I protect myself?**

* Know your HIV status
* Have a sexual relationship with only one uninfected person, who is having sex with only you.
* Use a condom for all sexual encounters
* Do not share any kind of needles

**You can NOT get HIV from:**

* Social contact- shaking hands, touching, hugging someone with HIV
* coughing or sneezing
* tears, saliva, or sweat
* sharing drinking glasses, plates, forks, knives, or spoons
* using public bathrooms and drinking fountains
* mosquito bites or other bug bites
* swimming pools or hot tubs
* pets
* mosquitoes

**HIV Testing**

If you think you have HIV or believe you are at high risk of contracting HIV - get a HIV test. The test is safe and private. You do not have to give your name if you do not want to.

**You can make an appointment for confidential testing at:**

**Public Health Clinic 244-2648**

**GT General Practice Clinic 244 2800/244 2507**

**District Health Centres**

**You may also have HIV testing with a private doctor**

For further information about HIV/AIDS call Public Health at 244-2507 or consult your doctor.

**What is HIV Testing?**

The HIV test looks for antigens and antibodies in a person’s blood. When HIV (which is a virus) enters a body, special chemicals are produced. These chemicals are called antigens and antibodies, which are the body’s response to an infection.

* **What does HIV testing involve?**

A small sample of blood will be taken from your arm, sent to a laboratory, and tested for HIV antigens and antibodies. The test is always strictly confidential.

* **What is a positive HIV test?**

HIV positive means that antigens and antibodies to HIV were detected, a confirmatory test must be completed to diagnosis HIV, this test is sent overseas and may take up to 10 days to return.

* **What is a negative HIV test?**

HIV negative means that no HIV antigens and antibodies were detected at this time. In almost all cases this means the person is not infected with HIV. With the fourth generation testing that HSA uses called HIV Combo (HIV antigen and Antibody testing) the previous known window period of three months has been reduced to 2-6 weeks.

The test is only accurate if there are no other exposures between the time of possible exposure to HIV and testing.