

Discharge Instructions for HIV Infection



You've been diagnosed with HIV. This is the virus that can cause AIDS. AIDS is a disease that can be life threatening. Untreated HIV attacks the body's immune system. This makes it tougher for your body to fight infections and cancers. The body can't get rid of HIV. But you can take steps to help stay healthier. And you can help prevent the spread of HIV.

Caring for yourself

- Take your medicine exactly as directed. Talk with your healthcare provider if you have side effects.
- Don't take any other medicine unless your provider says it's OK. This includes prescription and over-the-counter medicines. It includes vitamins and supplements. Some medicines can change how other medicines work. This can cause serious side effects.
- See your healthcare provider regularly. They will need to follow you closely for the rest of your life.
- Contact your provider if you have new symptoms or worse symptoms.
- Tell all your healthcare providers that you are HIV-positive. This includes dentists and dental hygienists.

Preventing the spread of HIV

If you are on HIV medicine and the amount of virus in your body (the viral load) is **undetectable**, your risk for spreading HIV is very low. Keeping an undetectable viral load is the best way to stay healthy and to prevent spreading HIV. Here are some tips:

- Never share needles. This includes needles for insulin.
- Don't share tools for drug use.
- If you get a tattoo or piercing, make sure the needles are destroyed afterward.
- Don't donate blood, plasma, semen, or organs.
- If you are trying to have a baby, make sure to take your antiretroviral medicine each day. Make sure your viral load is undetectable. Follow all your provider's directions for managing your HIV. This is important both before and during the pregnancy.

If your viral load is not undetectable, you can protect your sex partner in these ways:

- Use condoms every time you have anal or vaginal sex.
- Choose lower risk sexual activities, such as oral sex.
- Talk with your partner about pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). This is medicine your partner can take daily. It helps to prevent HIV infection.

Reducing your risk for infection

For people without HIV, common infections are normally not severe. But, there are also bacteria, parasites and fungi that are everywhere in our environment that only cause illness in people with untreated HIV. Common pets can be a source of illness. For people with HIV or AIDS, infections may cause severe problems. They can even lead to death if the body can't fight them.

If your HIV is controlled well and your immune system is strong, your risk for infection is low. Infection problems are less common now than in the early days of HIV. This is because treatments are better today. And today people understand and accept treatment better. But it's important to know how to reduce your risk and stay healthy.

To help protect your immune system:

- Follow a good diet and stay at a healthy weight. Talk with your healthcare provider about seeing a dietitian. They can help review your nutritional needs.
- Exercise to boost your immune system.
- Don't smoke or use tobacco products. If you do, try to quit.

To reduce your contact with germs:

- Wash your hands often with clean, running water. If soap and water are not available, use a hand cleaner that has alcohol.
- Wash your hands before and after treating cuts, scrapes, or wounds.
- Don't eat foods that are unsafe. This means foods that are undercooked, not pasteurized, or not washed. This includes runny eggs, raw milk and cheeses, unpasteurized fruit juices, and raw seed sprouts.
- Don't drink untreated water, such as from a creek or river. If you travel to foreign countries, drink bottled water or use water filters.

Some germs are more common in animals. To stay safe from these germs:

- Limit your exposure to farm, stray, or unknown animals.
- If you do have contact with an animal, wash your hands afterward.
- Don't have contact with pet urine or stool. Wear gloves if you might come in contact with pet urine or stool.
- Don't clean litter boxes, cages, or aquariums.

Follow-up care

Follow up with your healthcare provider, or as advised.

When to get medical care

Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of these:

- Blurred vision or other eye problems
- Trouble focusing
- Tiredness that gets worse
- Wheezing, trouble breathing, or shortness of breath
- Fast, irregular heartbeat
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Rash or hives
- Cut or rash that swells, turns red, feels hot or painful, or begins to ooze

- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed by your provider
- Diarrhea that does not go away after 2 loose stools
- Pain or cramping in your belly (abdomen)

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