

tell me the truth about **HIV & AIDS**



NACO

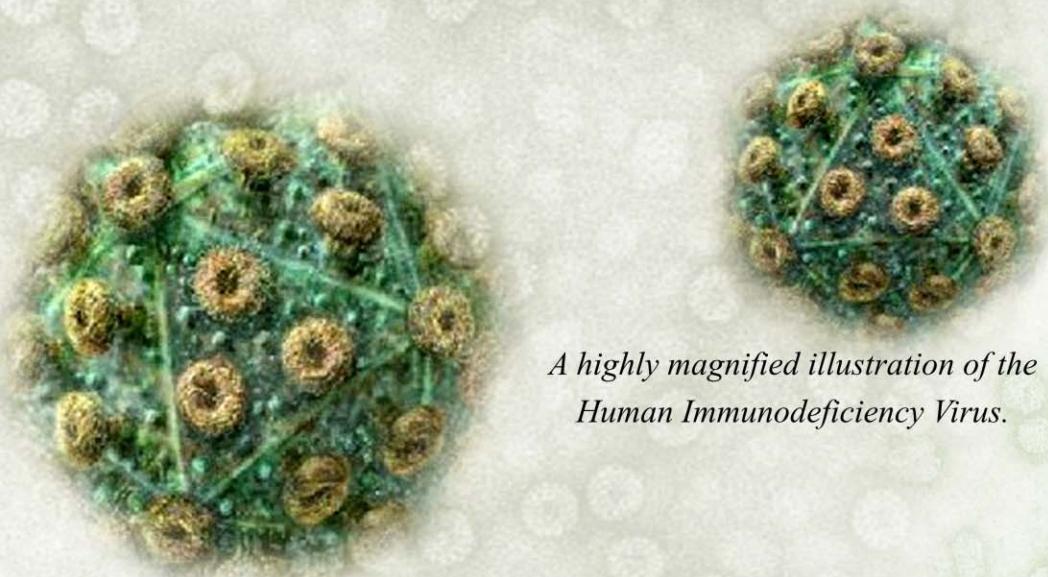
National AIDS Control Organisation

India's voice against AIDS

Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India

www.nacoindia.org

What is HIV ?



*A highly magnified illustration of the
Human Immunodeficiency Virus.*

'HIV stands for the 'Human Immunodeficiency Virus'. It attacks the immune system of the body. The immune system is a collection of mechanisms within the body that protects against infections. It does this by identifying and killing pathogens or 'foreign invaders' to the body such as viruses, bacteria, etc.

HIV is a virus that invades and breaks down the immune system, specifically the CD₄ cells. CD₄ cells are those cells that help the body to fight different diseases.

What happens when HIV infects a person?

HIV targets the CD₄ cells in the body. On entering the CD₄ cells, HIV rapidly reproduces itself until there are so many new viruses in the cell that the CD₄ cell explodes and many more viruses are released into the bloodstream. HIV then attacks other CD₄ cells and the process is repeated. Over time, HIV destroys most of the CD₄ cells, thereby destroying the immune system of the infected person.

Get tested for HIV. The test is easy, safe and available at public health facilities.

* The pictures in this brochure are for illustrative purpose only and do not in any way intend to indicate that the person shown is either living with HIV/AIDS, or practices unsafe behaviour.

A close-up portrait of a woman with dark hair pulled back. She is wearing large, clear, square-shaped hoop earrings. Her attire consists of a yellow sari with orange polka dots and a matching yellow blouse. She is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression.

What is AIDS ?

AIDS stands for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome. It is a condition characterized by a group of diseases that an HIV infected person may get as her/his body's immunity decreases gradually over a period of time.

How are HIV and AIDS different?

HIV is the name of the virus. AIDS is the condition caused by this virus. It usually takes 8-10 years for HIV to progress to AIDS. HIV and AIDS can be diagnosed on the basis of certain blood tests.

When a person has AIDS :

- The body's ability to resist even common or mild infections is considerably weakened.
and/or
- The person starts 'falling ill' frequently and feels weak.
and/or
- The person easily gets infections that may range from minor illnesses like common cold to TB, diarrhoea, fungal infection, etc.



Such infections are easily acquired when immunity is low. In an HIV positive person, these infections take the opportunity provided by a weakened immune system and are, therefore, called **opportunistic infections**.

Please remember that NOT all people who have TB, diarrhoea, fungal infections, etc. have HIV. It is the presence of HIV in the body that makes a person more vulnerable to these, or any other, illness.

*Don't be against People Living with HIV & AIDS.
Be against silence, discrimination and stigma.*

How does HIV spread?

How can I avoid getting HIV?

HIV spreads through **four** main routes:

1. By having unprotected sex



You can avoid HIV:

- ▶ **Abstain** from casual sex. **Be faithful** to your partner.
- ▶ Use **condoms** during sex. They are easily available in government health facilities, chemist's shops and general stores. Check expiry date and use correctly.
- ▶ Don't take the risk of getting infected for life for a few moments of unprotected pleasure.

2. By receiving HIV infected blood or blood products



You can avoid HIV:

- ▶ Always ensure you **take blood from a licensed blood bank** if you or any family member is in need of blood.
- ▶ Check with the blood bank to ensure that the blood has been screened for HIV. Ensure your blood bag carries the **sticker of mandatory testing for Transfusion Transmitted Infections**, including HIV.

3. By using unsterilised needles/syringes/lancets



You can avoid HIV:

- ▶ Always insist that **disposable/sterilised needles and syringes** are used when you have a blood test or during treatment.
- ▶ **Avoid injecting drugs**, and **do not share needles and syringes**.
- ▶ Be responsible. Ensure needles and syringes are **destroyed after use**.

4. From an HIV infected mother to her baby



Ms. Sharmila Tagore,
UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador,
with an HIV positive person

You can avoid infecting your baby with HIV:

- ▶ **Know your status**, get tested for HIV during pregnancy. Visit the nearest public health facility for free testing.
- ▶ **Take timely medication** to prevent transmission of HIV from mother to child. A single dose of medicine (Nevirapine) administered to the mother during labour and to the baby immediately after birth, can save the baby from acquiring HIV.

This is **available free of cost** at medical colleges, district hospitals and community health centres.



The AIDS symbol, a simple loop of red ribbon, is one of the most recognised symbols across the world. Created by a group of artists in New York, USA, in 1991, it symbolises solidarity with people living with HIV and their care givers.

Will I get HIV if...?



I shake hands or hug an HIV positive person?



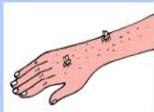
I'm friends with an HIV positive person?



I eat, drink, study or work with an HIV positive person?



I share clothes or a house with someone having HIV?



A mosquito bites me?



The answer is **NO**. Caring, sharing, and friendliness do not spread HIV. They spread happiness and warmth. Mosquito bites also do not spread HIV infection. HIV does not reproduce or live in the mosquito's saliva. In fact, studies show that HIV is a fragile virus that does not live outside the human body for long.

Don't discriminate. Integrate.

Remember you harm people living with HIV when you refuse to treat them as your friends, your family or your colleagues.

Do STIs increase the risk of HIV?

Yes. Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and Reproductive Tract Infections (RTIs) increase

vulnerability to HIV. Women have a 3-4 times higher risk of getting HIV and RTIs because of their biological make up. Presence of such infections, especially those characterised by lesions, sores or discharges, increase vulnerability to HIV tenfold.

- ❖ Get STIs/RTIs treated promptly.
- ❖ Avail treatment from a registered medical practitioner and stay away from quacks.
- ❖ Practice safe sex. Ensure correct and consistent use of condoms.

What is safe sex?

Practices that reduce the risk of getting/passing on infections during sexual intercourse are called safe sex practices. The primary method to prevent spread of infections, especially spread of HIV infection during sex, is correct and consistent condom use.

Condoms offer triple protection - from HIV, sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies.



Where can I get tested for HIV?

You can get tested for HIV at public health facilities. The test is a simple blood test and the results are kept completely confidential. Public health facilities have Integrated Counselling and Testing Centres (ICTCs) that provide information and assistance on HIV and AIDS, testing for HIV and pre- and post-test counselling in a friendly and confidential environment.

If I test positive for HIV, how will it affect my relationships?

HIV does not in any way affect your regular social interactions, nor does it make you incapable of working or leading a normal life. You can continue to pursue your interests and hobbies, meet your friends and colleagues and be a member of any social gathering you choose.

You need to be careful about a few basic things:

- Do not have unprotected sex. Use condoms correctly and consistently.
- Do not donate blood if you are HIV positive.
- Do not share needles.

If you follow these rules, you do not run the risk of infecting anyone else.

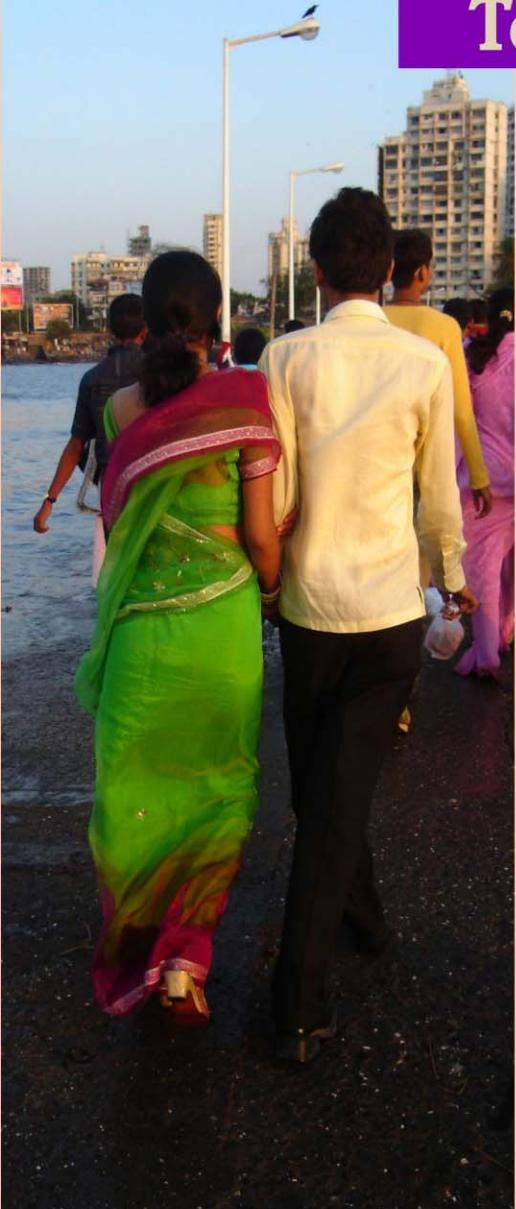
If you have any specific queries or concerns, call the helpline 1097 for obtaining correct information confidentially.



1097



Tell me about sex and HIV



HIV lives in body fluids like seminal fluids, vaginal fluids and blood. More than 85% of all HIV infections occur due to unsafe sex. Having sex with multiple partners or with commercial sex workers - male and female - greatly increases risk of getting HIV. Some simple steps to avoid getting HIV through the sexual route are:

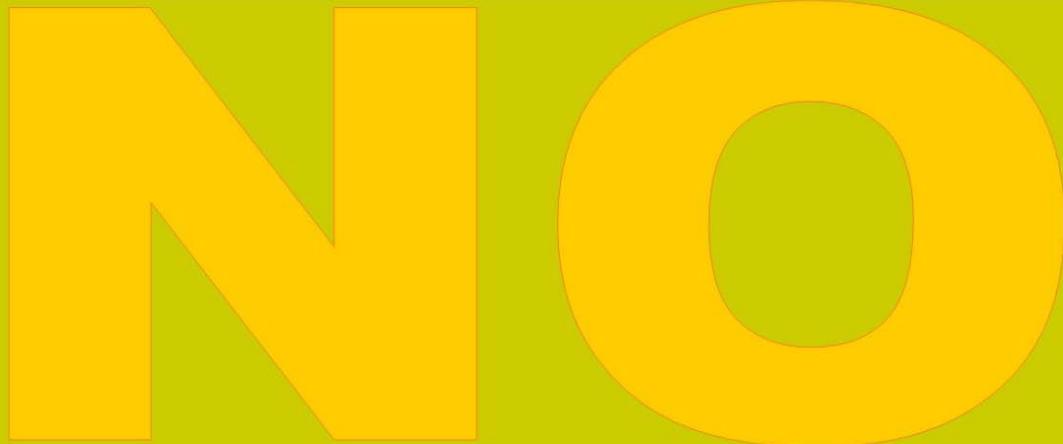
- Abstain from pre- or extra- marital sex.
- Be faithful to your partner.
- Use condoms correctly and consistently. Check the expiry date on the condom. Keep condoms away from heat and pressure. Never reuse a condom.

Even if your partner is HIV positive, you can avoid getting the infection by using a condom during sex. If you have tested positive for HIV, you must make it a 100% practice to use a condom during sex, even if your partner is also HIV positive. This is to prevent reinfecting yourself or your partner with different strains of HIV.

Studies also show that use of **alcohol** and **recreational drugs** increases risky behaviour, making people indulge in unprotected or casual sex, greatly increasing the risk of being infected by HIV.

Prevention is the only choice.

Can HIV and AIDS be cured?



No. HIV and AIDS cannot be cured. That is why prevention is so important. So are timely medical treatment and care. Everyone should get themselves tested for HIV as timely Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) and healthy lifestyle can help people with HIV and AIDS lead a normal life for many years.

Everyone who has HIV does not need to take ART. ART starts when the CD₄ count goes below a certain level. CD₄ count is monitored through the CD₄ test.

Once ART starts it must be adhered to strictly. ART has to be taken for life. It is for your doctor to decide when you should start ART.

Healthy lifestyle, good nutrition and a positive mindset can effectively delay the need to take ART.

HIV and AIDS cannot be cured but they can be managed.

If ART is not a cure, why is it important for people living with HIV & AIDS?

Although ART is not a cure for HIV, it helps an HIV positive person with low CD₄ count lead a normal life for many years by:

- Slowing down the spread of HIV in the body
- Keeping the HIV infection level in check
- Preventing development of opportunistic infections

Taking ART regularly, maintaining a healthy environment, a positive mindset, good nutrition and regular exercise are all essential aspects of leading a healthy life with HIV and AIDS.

- ▶ Once ART starts, the person must take medication regularly. Interruption or frequent missing of ART dose makes the virus develop resistance to the medication. If this happens:
 - The treatment becomes less effective or even ineffective.
 - Patients start to have an increased viral load in the blood.
 - Stronger and more expensive drugs need to be taken. ◀

So, if you have tested positive, consult your doctor early to see if you are medically eligible for treatment. Avail of free CD₄ test and free treatment at select government hospitals across the country. ART is now available for adults and children.

A timely start of ART and strict adherence to it can help you lead a normal life for many years.

Who are

more vulnerable to HIV infection?

Anyone can get HIV infection. It affects all regions and all economic and social classes. However, some groups are considered more vulnerable for various reasons. These are:

Women

Women are biologically more vulnerable to HIV than men.

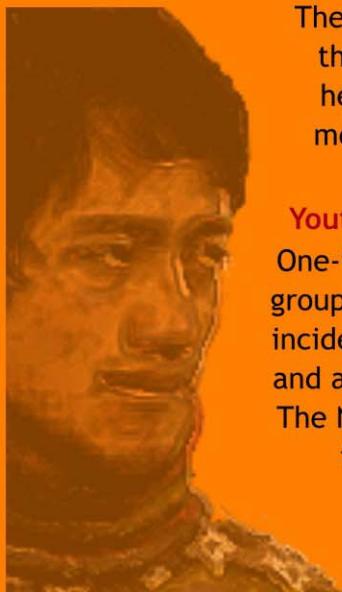
This vulnerability is increased due to lower economic status, lower levels of education and lack of negotiating power within family relationships. Women are usually not in a position to demand that their husbands use condoms. As a result, almost 39% of all HIV infections in India occur among women, even though most of them remain faithful to a single partner/husband.



The growing rates of infection among women are of concern not only for their own health but also because an infected mother may pass HIV to her baby if she is unaware of her status and does not take timely medication and care.

Youth

One-third of all reported AIDS cases occur in young people of the age group 15-29 years. Early commencement of sexual activity and increasing incidence of pre-marital sex along with inadequate information, life-skills and access to safe sexual practices make young people highly vulnerable. The National AIDS Control Programme has helped design specific interventions like the Adolescence Education Programme (AEP) that inform and empower young people.





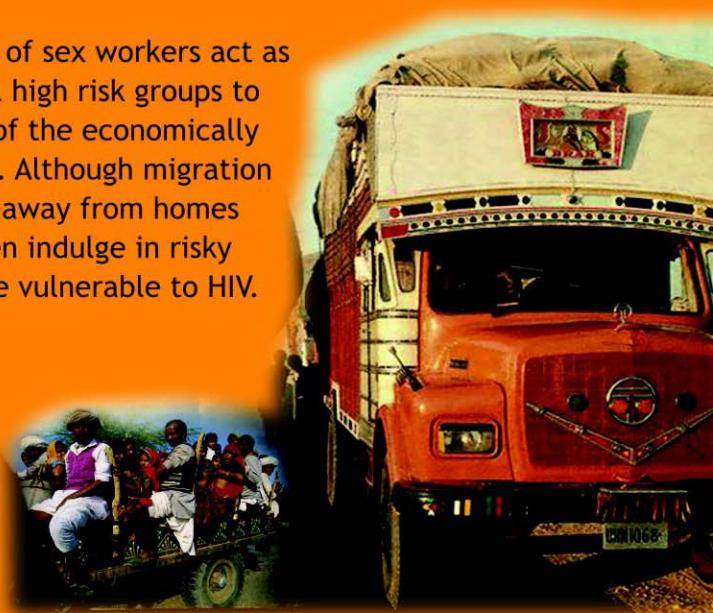
High Risk Groups

Commercial Sex Workers (CSWs), Men having Sex with Men (MSM), Injecting Drug Users (IDUs) and transgenders are often a hidden population. Open to harassment, stigma and discrimination, these groups have poor access to information and services, making them highly vulnerable to HIV infection.

The National AIDS Control Programme, Phase III focuses on increasing reach to these groups and improving access to information and services for them.

Bridge Populations

Migrant populations, truckers and clients of sex workers act as agents by which HIV is moving from small high risk groups to general populations. Approximately 25% of the economically productive population of India is migrant. Although migration is not itself a risk factor, people who are away from homes and families for long periods of time often indulge in risky sexual behaviour which makes them more vulnerable to HIV.



A Call for Action

Every individual has a role to play in responding to the HIV and AIDS epidemic. People fear HIV and sometimes discriminate against those who are infected with the virus. This is largely due to ignorance and misinformation. Here are some suggestions on how you can help reverse the rising tide of HIV infection.

What individuals can do

Break the silence: Whether or not you are HIV positive, talk to people about HIV and AIDS. Educate and inform to end ignorance and fear. Discuss condom use.

Prevent prejudice, stigma and discrimination: Set a visible example of compassion and understanding within your family and community.

Promote voluntary blood donation: Influence people to donate blood voluntarily. Voluntary blood donation can be done by any healthy person in the age group 18-60 years at any licensed blood bank. Blood donation does not increase your risk of getting HIV infection and can save someone else's life.

What Business/Corporates Can Do

Protect members of the workforce and their families:

- Educate and inform the workforce
- Set up STI clinics
- Provide easy access to condoms
- Include voluntary HIV testing and counselling in on-going health initiatives

Adopt a non-discriminatory workplace policy: Protect the rights of PLHA in your organisation

Advocacy and leadership: Organise and participate in awareness generation events. Lobby for HIV initiatives at business forums

Community partnership: Partner with local community stakeholders in initiatives for HIV education and/or care and support of PLHA and their families

What elected representatives can do

Establish forums for debate on issues related to HIV and AIDS at all levels, from panchayat to Parliament. Break the silence and stigma surrounding HIV.

Lobby for HIV and AIDS legislation, national plans and budgetary allocations. Push for strong health and social service.

Advocate for effective HIV and AIDS education and counselling, ensuring non-discriminatory access to voluntary and confidential counselling and HIV testing. Provide for youth-friendly and gender-sensitive sexual and reproductive health and family planning services, condoms, blood screening, drug and alcohol abusers' rehabilitation, and needle-exchange for injecting drug users.

Expand access to condoms, STI treatment, testing and Antiretroviral Therapy.

Fight poverty and deprivation: Forge national, regional and international partnerships that address the constraints to development, whether these stem from gender inequality, budgetary shortfalls, adverse terms of trade or international debt.

Break the silence Mobilise action



Community partnership Prevent prejudice

Non-discriminatory workplace policy Protect members of the workforce and their families



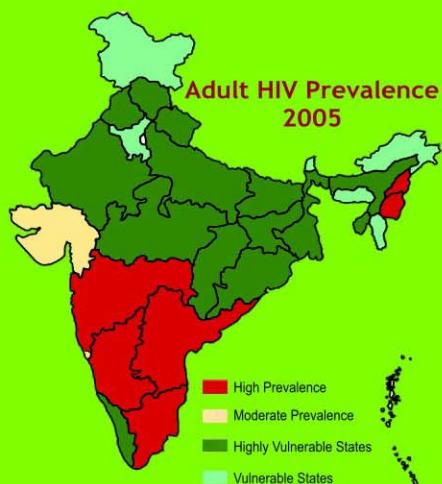
Leadership Advocacy

An overview of HIV in India

The first case of HIV infection in India was reported in 1986 in Chennai. The Government of India took speedy action in putting together a national strategy to combat HIV and, as a result, the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) was born in 1992. Supported by 38 State AIDS Control Societies (SACS) that function at the state level, NACO is the nodal agency for coordinating HIV and AIDS prevention and control efforts in the country.

There are an estimated 2.5 million people in the 15-49 year age group who are infected with HIV in India making it the country with the third highest number of HIV infections worldwide. Over the last 20 years, the infection has been seen to be moving from urban centres to rural areas and from high risk groups like commercial sex workers, injecting drug users and men having sex with men to the general population. Huge numbers of migrant workers and bridge populations like the clients of sex workers have also led to almost 39% of HIV infections being amongst women. The highest number

of new infections is taking place among young people due to ignorance, and lack of access to proper information and services. NACO is spearheading India's fight against HIV and AIDS at all levels of government and civil society. Two phases of National AIDS Control Programme, NACP-I and NACP-II have been implemented to bring about a concerted and coordinated national movement to halt and reverse the tide of the epidemic within the NACP III (2007-2012) period. The main thrust of the programme will be on the following:



- Saturating the estimated 4 million High Risk Population (CSWs, IDUs and MSM) through proposed 2,100 Targeted Interventions



- Scaling up access to preventive services, counselling and testing facilities in the general population for behaviour change towards a more responsible lifestyle.
- Breaking the silence surrounding issues related to sex and sexuality for universal adoption of safe and responsible sexual behaviour.
- Making condom use a routine through establishment of 3 million sale points.
- Increasing the proportion of voluntary blood donation from 56.4% at present to 90%.
- Promoting Greater Involvement of People living with HIV/AIDS (PLHA), facilitating establishment of PLHA networks and civil society forums in each district.
- Providing ART treatment in 250 centres, covering 300,000 PLHA and 40,000 children. Scaling up testing to at least 22 million tests per year by establishing 5,000 testing centres in the public sector.

For more information visit www.nacoonline.org or www.nacoindia.org

Widowed, looking after two small children and living with HIV. Shanti Noronha, a young woman from Udupi, Karnataka dreams to create a world where those living with HIV can live with dignity, free from stigma and discrimination. Using her limited resources and boundless courage, she has started a network to help the people of Udupi fight a virus more deadly than HIV... the virus of ignorance, discrimination and intolerance.



*The Virus does not discriminate...
It can affect anyone!*



Be Safe



Dial **1097** for more information



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9th Floor, Chandralok Building,
36, Janpath,
New Delhi 110 001