**HIV**  
The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infects cells of the immune system, destroying or impairing their function. Infection with the virus results in progressive deterioration of the immune system, leading to "immune deficiency." The immune system is considered deficient when it can no longer fulfil its role of fighting infection and disease. Infections associated with severe immunodeficiency are known as "opportunistic infections", because they take advantage of a weakened immune system.

**AIDS**  
Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) is a term which applies to the most advanced stages of HIV infection. It is defined by the occurrence of any of more than 20 opportunistic infections or HIV-related cancers.

**The Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic  
Number of People with HIV**—There were approximately 38.4 million people across the globe with HIV in 2021. Of these, 36.7 million were adults and 1.7 million were children (<15 years old). In addition, 54% were women and girls.

**New HIV Infections**—An estimated 1.5 million individuals worldwide acquired HIV in 2021, marking a 32% decline in new HIV infections since 2010. New HIV infections, or “HIV incidence,” refers to the estimated number of people who newly acquired HIV during a given period such as a year, which is different from the number of people *diagnosed* with HIV during a year. (Some people may have HIV but not know it.) Of these 1.5 million new HIV infections:

* 1.3 million were among adults
* 160,000 were among children (<15 years old)

**HIV Testing**—Approximately 85% of people with HIV globally knew their HIV status in 2021. The remaining 15% (about 5.9 million people) did not know they had HIV and still needed access to HIV testing services. HIV testing is an essential gateway to HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support services.

**Kenya   
Key statistics: 2021**

* 1.4 million people with HIV
* 4% adult HIV prevalence
* 35,000 new HIV infections
* 22,000 AIDS-related deaths
* 78% people on antiretroviral treatment

**HIV transmission**   
HIV can be transmitted through unprotected sexual intercourse (vaginal or anal), and oral sex with an infected person; transfusion of contaminated blood; and the sharing of contaminated needles, syringes, surgical equipment or other sharp instruments. It may also be transmitted between a mother and her infant during pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding.

**Progress towards targets**

The current targets for HIV testing and treatment are called the [**95-95-95 targets**](https://www.beintheknow.org/understanding-hiv-epidemic/context/global-hiv-targets) and must be reached by 2025 in order to end AIDS by 2030.

**Did you know?**

About 78% of people with HIV (whether they know their status or not) are on treatment in Kenya.

**Did you know?**

Keeping girls in school to transition to and complete secondary education significantly reduces their vulnerability to HIV, as it helps increase girls’ control over their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Kenya’s current AIDS strategy promotes interventions that keep girls in school.

**Testing**

Testing for HIV is:

* possible via self-testing kits, which are available from vending machines in some areas
* being expanded in the community as opposed to just at health clinics
* being integrated into other service centres, such as contraception, vaccination, and TB clinics.

**Did you know?**

Knowledge of one’s own HIV status is lower among men and boys (88%) than among women and girls (94%).

**Treatment**

Treatment for HIV is:

* initiated as soon as someone tests positive for HIV
* seeing reduced numbers of people staying on their treatment
* holistic, focusing on early diagnosis, mental health and psychosocial interventions.

**Local context**

Kenya’s HIV epidemic affects everyone, but men who have sex with men, women, sex workers and people who inject drugs are more likely to get HIV. Young women and girls are disproportionately affected by poverty, violence and injustice that make them vulnerable to HIV. HIV prevalence among young women is almost twice that of young men – 2.1% versus 1.2%.

[**HIV-related stigma**](https://www.beintheknow.org/understanding-hiv-epidemic/context/stigma-and-hiv) remains a huge issue. The People Living With HIV Stigma Index (2021) found that 62% of people delayed taking an HIV test because they were worried about people’s reaction if they tested positive, and 47% of people with HIV who stopped or interrupted treatment did so because they were scared of people finding out they had HIV.

It is estimated that at least two thirds of couples with HIV are discordant, meaning one of the partners has HIV and one doesn’t.

Kenya was one of the first countries in sub-Saharan Africa to approve the use of oral PrEP and is one of just three countries that managed to increase access to PrEP throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kenya also leads the way in providing [**voluntary medical male circumcision**](https://www.beintheknow.org/hiv-and-stis/hiv-prevention/voluntary-medical-male-circumcision-vmmc). It is the only priority country to have reached the target of 90% of men and boys obtaining the procedure.

**HIV key populations:**Key populations are **defined groups who, due to specific higher-risk behaviors, are at increased risk of HIV, irrespective of the epidemic type or local context**. Also, they often have legal and social issues related to their behaviors that increase their vulnerability to HIV.

* Men who have sex with men
* Transgender people, especially transgender women
* Sex workers
* People who inject drugs
* People in prison and detention

**HIV Progression to AIDS**The length of time can vary widely between individuals. Left without treatment, the majority of people infected with HIV will develop signs of HIV-related illness within 5–10 years, although this can be shorter. The time between acquiring HIV and an AIDS diagnosis is usually between 10–15 years, but sometimes longer. Antiretroviral therapy (ART) can slow the disease progression by preventing the virus replicating and therefore decreasing the amount of virus in an infected person’s blood (known as the ‘viral load’).

**What is AIDS?**

AIDS stands for “acquired immunodeficiency syndrome.” It is an advanced stage of HIV infection.   
  
Doctors identify AIDS as having a CD4 count of [fewer than 200 cells](https://hivinfo.nih.gov/understanding-hiv/fact-sheets/hivaids-basics) per cubic millimeter. Also, they may diagnose AIDS if a person has characteristic opportunistic infections, associated types of cancer, or both.

When a person with HIV does not receive treatment, AIDS likely develops, as the immune system gradually wears down. However, advances in antiretroviral treatments have made this progression to AIDS increasingly less common.

**Causes**

HIV can transmit when body fluids containing the virus come into contact with a permeable barrier in the body or small breaks in moist tissues of areas such as the genitals.

Specifically, HIV can transmit via:

* blood
* semen
* pre-seminal fluid
* vaginal fluids
* rectal fluids
* breast milk

The virus cannot transmit through saliva, so a person cannot contract HIV through open-mouthed kissing, for example.

One of the [main causes](https://aidsinfo.nih.gov/understanding-hiv-aids/fact-sheets/19/45/hiv-aids--the-basics) of HIV transmission in the U.S. is anal or vaginal intercourse. For the transmission to happen, the people must not be using barrier protection, such as a condom, or taking pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), a treatment that aims to prevent HIV transmission among people with known risk factors.

Another main cause of HIV transmission in the country is sharing equipment for injecting drugs.

Less commonly, HIV transmits to babies during pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding.

Also, there is a chance of transmission in blood transfusions, though the risk is extremely low when blood donations are effectively screened.

**Undetectable = untransmittable**

HIV can only transmit through fluids that contain a certain amount of the virus. If a person has undetectable levels of HIV, the virus cannot transmit to another person.   
Some people use a shorthand to refer to the fact that undetectable levels of HIV are untransmittable: U=U.

**Progression to AIDS**

The chances of HIV progressing to AIDS vary widely from person to person and depend on many factors, including the:

* person’s age
* body’s ability to defend against HIV
* accessibility of quality healthcare
* presence of other infections
* person’s genetic resistance to certain strains of HIV
* strain of HIV, as some are drug resistant

**Early symptoms of HIV may include:**

* [a fever](https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/323845)
* chills
* sweating, particularly at night
* enlarged glands or [swollen lymph nodes](https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/316336)
* [a diffuse rash](https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/315963)
* [fatigue](https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/323890)
* weakness
* [pain](https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/323860), including joint pain
* muscle aches
* [a sore throat](https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/311449)
* thrush, or a yeast infection
* unintentional weight loss, with advancing HIV

**HIV and AIDS myths and facts**

Many misconceptions circulate about HIV. These are harmful and stigmatizing.

The following cannot transmit the virus:

* shaking hands
* hugging
* kissing
* sneezing
* touching unbroken skin
* sharing a toilet with someone who has HIV
* sharing towels
* sharing cutlery
* mouth-to-mouth resuscitation
* anything that might be considered casual contact
* touching the saliva, tears, feces, or urine of a person with HIV

**Prevention**Preventing HIV in Kenya focuses on:

* condom provision
* comprehensive sexuality education
* [**PEP**](https://www.beintheknow.org/hiv-programming-and-best-practice/prevention/hiv-prevention-programmes)
* [**PrEP**](https://www.beintheknow.org/hiv-programming-and-best-practice/prevention/hiv-prevention-programmes) (oral PrEP is available; a PrEP vaginal ring and injection are being trialled)
* gender-based violence prevention
* a range of prevention services for [**young people**](https://www.beintheknow.org/understanding-hiv-epidemic/community/hiv-and-young-people), particularly adolescent girls and young women
* [**voluntary medical male circumcision**](https://www.beintheknow.org/hiv-and-stis/hiv-prevention/voluntary-medical-male-circumcision-vmmc)
* [**harm reduction for people who use drugs**](https://www.beintheknow.org/understanding-hiv-epidemic/community/hiv-and-people-who-use-drugs)
* prevention of mother-to-child transmission
* integrated HIV and SRHR services, including testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections
* linked to HIV testing services, including partner testing.

## 

## Treatment

While there is no cure for HIV, treatments can stop the progression of the infection.

Receiving these treatments, called antiretrovirals, can reduce the risk of transmission. It can also extend a person’s life expectancy and improve the quality of life.

Many people who take HIV treatments live long, healthy lives. These medications are becoming increasingly effective and well-tolerated. A person may need to take just one pill per day.

The following sections look at HIV treatments and medications for prevention.

### **Emergency HIV pills: PEP**

Anyone who may have been exposed to the virus within the last 72 hours should speak with a healthcare provider about PEP.   
  
This medication may be able to stop the infection, especially if a person takes it as soon as possible after the potential exposure.

A person takes PEP for 28 days, and a doctor monitors the person for HIV afterward.   
  
PEP is not 100% effective, so it is important to use prevention techniques, such as barrier protection and safe injection practices, including while taking PEP.

### **Antiretroviral drugs**

Treating HIV involves taking antiretroviral medications, which fight the infection and slow the spread of the virus.

People generally take a combination of medications, called highly active antiretroviral therapy or combination antiretroviral therapy. A person might refer to the approach as HAART or cART, respectively.