

HIV 101: KNOW THE FACTS ABOUT HIV

**HOW
IT'S
VIEWED**

Stigma is a huge barrier to prevention, testing, treatment, and support for people living with or at risk for HIV.



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The fact is people with HIV often face unfair treatment in school, healthcare, and work settings. Some are shunned by their family and community, which may leave them with nowhere to live or without their livelihood. Stereotypes about people who are at risk of HIV continue to affect people who don't even have the virus.

Fear of stigma is the main reason why people may not seek healthcare services, disclose their HIV status or take antiretroviral drugs.* Fear of taking an HIV test means that more people are diagnosed late, when the virus may have already progressed to AIDS. This makes treatment less effective and increases the likelihood of transmitting HIV to others.¹

*UNAIDS and the World Health Organization (WHO) cites fear of stigma and discrimination as the main reason why people are reluctant to get tested, disclose their HIV status and take antiretroviral drugs (ARVs).



MAKE SURE YOU KNOW THE TRUE STORY ABOUT HIV.

FACT 1:

The ~ 38,000 new HIV infections that occur annually in the United States are preventable through testing, treatment, and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) use.

The US government seeks to reduce new infections by at least 90% by 2030. Stigma stands in the way. Anticipated HIV-related stigma prevents individuals from doing the very things that will help them from getting or transmitting HIV and staying healthy.²

FACT 2:

You won't know you have HIV unless you get tested.

Many people living with HIV have no outward symptoms or signs. An estimated 1.2 million Americans are living with HIV, yet one out of 8 people with HIV do not know they have it. You can be HIV positive and not have any symptoms for years. The only way to know if you're positive is to get tested.²



FACT 3:

If you are sexually active or are injecting drugs, you should get tested for HIV as soon as possible.

The survival and long-term health of people with HIV are significantly improved by beginning HIV treatment early. Getting tested and starting treatment sooner rather than later means that you can begin to protect your health when it matters most.³

FACT 4:

Even if you're a straight man and don't use IV drugs you can still acquire HIV.

Most men become HIV positive through sexual contact with other men, but you can get the virus from heterosexual contact, too. About 1 in 6 men and 3 in 4 women contract HIV through heterosexual contact.³

FACT 5:

Condoms are not the only way to prevent HIV from being transmitted during sexual intercourse.

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (also known as PrEP) is a way to prevent contracting HIV by taking medication. It is still smart to use a condom when you have sex, especially if you don't know your partner's status.



FACT 6:

Today there are many medications available to treat HIV and AIDS that make it easier than ever to stay healthy.

Many people living with HIV can take one pill daily that contains a combination of highly active antiretroviral therapy known as ART. When taken as directed, ART can reduce the amount of HIV in the blood to undetectable levels. If undetectable levels are maintained a person living with HIV can stay healthy and have effectively no risk of transmitting HIV to their sexual partners.³

FACT 7:

1 in 5 new HIV infections occurs in youth ages 13 to 24.

In 2017, this age group made up 21% of the 38,739 new HIV diagnoses in the United States. Almost half of youth ages 18-24 living with HIV in the US do not know they have the virus so are not getting treated and can unknowingly pass the virus on to others. In a 2017 survey of young adults 18 to 30, more than half reported they have never been tested for HIV and nearly two-thirds said they have never talked with a healthcare provider about HIV.^{4,5}



WAYS TO FIGHT STIGMA

Legally fighting inequality and discrimination is one important approach. Legislative changes can help to improve people's health and reduce stigma; but legal advances are not enough, cultural norms also need to change.

Listen to people living with HIV

People who live with and experience a disease or social reality deserve a voice in decisions that affect them. This means that people with HIV must be at the forefront of the movement to end HIV and AIDS stigma.

Start with yourself

Everyone can help play a role in ending the HIV Epidemic. Educate yourself, your family and friends about HIV and AIDS. Speak out against HIV-related stigma and help change how HIV is viewed. Get the comprehensive facts⁶ about **HIV prevention** and learn the HIV and AIDS impact in your area at **[AIDSVU.org](https://aidsvu.org)**.

References:

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