



Yolanda Wimberly, M.D.  
Department of Pediatrics



Vincent Bond, Ph.D.  
Research Centers in Minority  
Institutions  
Department of Microbiology,  
Biochemistry and Immunology

A person does not "get" AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). They get infected with HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus). Later they can develop AIDS. HIV can be spread from anyone who is already infected, even if they don't look sick or regardless that they have not been tested HIV-positive yet. The blood, vaginal fluid, semen, and breast milk of people infected with HIV has enough of the virus in it to infect other people. Most people get the HIV virus by: (1) having sex with an infected person; (2) sharing a needle (shooting drugs) with someone who's infected; (3) Being born when their mother is infected, or drinking the breast milk of an infected woman. Here are a few tips that will surely help in keeping from getting HIV.

### **Abstain from sex**

There's nothing religious about this. And, it's not about saving yourself for the right guy or being a virgin for the rest of your life. It's about keeping yourself safe from HIV. You shouldn't have any sex until you are in a monogamous relationship and each of you knows the other's HIV status. Otherwise, you'll need to use some protection in order to keep yourself safe.

### **Use a condom**

If you do not follow sexual abstinence make sure that you use a latex condom. If both of you are already HIV positive, use condoms to lessen the risk of infection from other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and possible infection with a different strain of HIV. If only one of you has HIV, use a latex condom and lubricant in order to prevent dryness that can cause the vaginal wall to tear every time you have sex.

### **Talking about AIDS helps**

Talk about HIV and other STDs with your partner before you have sex. Learn as much as you can about your partner's past behavior (sex and drug use), and consider the risks to your health before you have sex. Ask your partner if they have recently been tested for HIV; encourage them and others to do so.

### **Do not inject Drugs**

Do not inject illicit drugs (drugs banned by law). You can get HIV through needles or syringes if they are contaminated with the blood of someone who has HIV. Also, drugs cloud your mind, which may result in riskier sex. If you do inject drugs, do the following: Use only clean needles, syringes, and other items.

### **Get Tested**

If you think you may have another STD such as gonorrhea, syphilis, or Chlamydia trachomatis infection, you should get yourself tested and get treatment. These STDs will increase your risk of getting HIV. Even if you think you are from a low risk group for HIV infection, get tested whenever you have a regular medical check-up. If you are a woman who is planning to get pregnant or who is pregnant, get tested as soon as possible, before you have your baby. If you have had, or plan to have, more than one sex partner: Get an HIV Test!! If you are a man who has had sex with other men, get tested at least once a year.

### **Consult your health care professional**

Get vaccinated against Hepatitis A and B viruses. Because Hepatitis A and B attack the liver and weaken the body, it makes you more susceptible to HIV.

To protect yourself, remember these ABC's: A=Abstinence (Don't engage in any form of sex until you are sure of the others status); B=Be Faithful (Don't fool around); C=Condoms (Don't leave home without it).