



THE FACTS

**HIV PREVENTION:
HOW DOES HIV
GET PASSED ON?**

HOW IS HIV TRANSMITTED?

HIV can be transmitted when a body fluid containing enough HIV leaves the body of one person and enters the body of another person.

The only body fluids that may contain enough HIV are:

- Blood
- Semen (and pre-ejaculate)
- Vaginal fluids
- Breast milk/chest milk.

Body fluids such as saliva, sweat and nasal mucus do not contain enough HIV to pass on the virus. This means **HIV can NOT be transmitted** through everyday contact like coughing, sneezing, hugging, kissing, or sharing utensils. It also cannot be passed through mosquito or animal bites.

The activities that have risk of passing on HIV are:

- Anal/vaginal sex
- Pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding/chestfeeding
- Sharing needles for drug use, tattooing or piercing

WHAT IS A VIRAL LOAD AND HOW DOES IT AFFECT HIV TRANSMISSION?

Viral load is the amount of HIV virus within your body.

The higher the viral load, the higher the chance of passing on HIV. Without treatment, people with HIV usually have a high viral load. This means that their blood, semen, vaginal fluids, and breast milk / chest milk may all contain enough of the HIV virus to transmit HIV.

Modern HIV treatments are very good at keeping you healthy and stopping HIV transmission. HIV treatment lowers your viral load. **Viral suppression** happens when the amount of HIV in the body is so low that it is no longer possible for it to be passed to another person sexually.

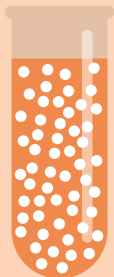
Many years of medical research have proven that a person with HIV who is **virally suppressed** cannot transmit HIV to their sexual partner. This means if you have maintained a viral load below 200 copies/ml for at least six months and continue to take your medication (as recommended by your doctor) there is no risk of passing on HIV to a sexual partner.

Viral suppression is sometimes called **undetectable viral load**. This is the reason for the popular slogan *Undetectable = Untransmittable* or *U=U*.

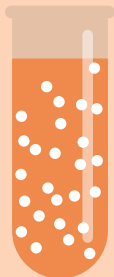
Scientific evidence has shown that viral loads below 200c/ml are not enough to transmit HIV.

Viral load and sexual transmission

High viral load
High risk of passing on the virus



Low viral load
Risk of passing on the virus



**Virally suppressed/
undetectable <200c/ml**
No risk of passing on the virus



HOW CAN HIV BE PREVENTED?

Preventing Sexual Transmission

HIV can be transmitted if either partner has HIV. However, there are a number of highly effective ways you can prevent passing HIV onto your sexual partner/s.

Treatment as Prevention and U=U

If you have HIV and are virally suppressed (undetectable) you cannot transmit HIV to your sexual partner/partners. This is known as Treatment as Prevention or Undetectable = Untransmittable.

Condoms and lubricant

If you are not virally suppressed or are unsure of the status of your partner/s then you can prevent HIV transmission by using condoms during vaginal and anal sex. Condoms significantly reduce the risk of HIV transmission. Remember to use water-based lubricant to prevent breakage.

PrEP

Pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP, is a medication taken by HIV-negative people to prevent getting HIV. It is highly effective when taken consistently as prescribed. Talk to a peer worker or healthcare professional about whether PrEP might be suitable for your HIV-negative partner/s.

What about transmission during pregnancy, childbirth and feeding?

When you are on treatment and virally suppressed (undetectable) for the whole pregnancy the risk of baby being born with HIV is extremely low (less than 1 percent). Most HIV treatments are safe during pregnancy. Talk to your HIV doctor if you are thinking of conceiving or are pregnant.

Recent research has shown that if you are on HIV antiretroviral treatment and virally suppressed, the risk of HIV transmission through breast milk / chest milk is very low. While current medical guidance in Australia is to formula feed to prevent any chance of transmission, you might make the decision to breastfeed/chestfeed.

Visit Positive Women Victoria for more information on breastfeeding/chestfeeding or go to the *More Information* QR code at the end.

Is it still risky to share needles or other sharps?

HIV can be passed on by sharing needles to inject drugs, hormones, or medications, and piercing or tattooing equipment. Viral suppression greatly reduces the risk of passing on HIV when sharing injecting, tattooing, or piercing equipment, but we don't know by how much.

It is recommended to use clean needles and syringes every time to prevent passing on HIV and other blood-borne viruses. Needle and Syringe Programs (NSPs) provide free sterile injecting equipment and disposal services for everyone in Victoria.

IF SOMEONE HAS BEEN EXPOSED TO HIV, WHAT SHOULD THEY DO?

If someone has been exposed to HIV it is recommended that they seek out medication called HIV Post-Exposure Prophylaxis or PEP. PEP reduces the chance of HIV infection. It's important to start taking PEP as soon as possible, ideally within 2 hours, and no later than 72 hours (3 days) after the exposure.

To find the closest place to access PEP call the PEP Phoneline on **1800 889 887** or visit **www.getpep.info**

FOR MORE INFORMATION

