

# HIV

## (Human immunodeficiency virus)

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### What is HIV?

- HIV is a virus that can damage the body's immune system.
- The immune system protects the body against infection.
- If your child's immune system is damaged by HIV, they could be at risk for getting severe infections that could make them very sick

### What tests could my child have to find out if they have HIV?

- Tell your child's doctor if you think your child has had an HIV exposure in the past 4 weeks.
- Your child's doctor may order special tests that could help detect the infection earlier.
- There are different test options that help make the diagnosis. These include blood tests or fluid swabs (oral fluid).

### What is the treatment?

- While there is no cure for HIV, medicines can completely control the disease.
- If your child has HIV, talk with their doctor about the right medicine routine for your child.
- Many people with HIV can expect to have normal, healthy lives when they take medicines as prescribed by their doctor.

### How could my child get HIV?

Most often, HIV in babies and young children comes from mothers who have uncontrolled HIV infection.

- A mother with uncontrolled HIV can spread it to her child during:
  - Pregnancy
  - Birth
  - Breastfeeding
- If a baby has HIV and the mother was unaware of the diagnosis, the mother needs to be tested right away. The mother may also need treatment.
- Babies and toddlers can also be exposed if they eat pre-chewed food by a person with uncontrolled HIV. This happens when infected blood from the person's mouth mixes with food while chewing.

### How does HIV spread?

HIV infection can spread if your child:

- Has unprotected sex with someone who has uncontrolled HIV (consensual or otherwise).
- Shares drug needles with people who have HIV.
- Has a blood transfusion or organ/tissue transplant that is contaminated with HIV. This is very rare in the United States due to the careful testing of donated blood, organs and tissues.

**In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.**

# HIV, continued

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## How can I help prevent my child from getting HIV?

Today, there are more tools than ever to help prevent HIV. Your child can use 1 or more of these plans:

- Abstain from having sex (not have sex).
- Use condoms the right way every time they have sex.
- Take medicines each day to help prevent getting the virus. This is called [pre-exposure prophylaxis](#) or PrEP.
- Take medicines within the first 48 hours after exposure. This is to help prevent getting the virus. This is called [post-exposure prophylaxis](#) or PEP.

You can also talk with doctors who focus on teen care.

- Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta has an Adolescent Medicine Clinic where they see patients from when puberty begins until a child stops growing and reaches adulthood.
- They offer a Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) Clinic.
- To learn more, visit [choa.org/medical-services/adolescent-medicine](http://choa.org/medical-services/adolescent-medicine).

## What are the symptoms of HIV?

Your child may have flu-like symptoms within 2 to 4 weeks after they are infected with HIV. These symptoms may last for a few days to several weeks. Symptoms include:

- Fever
- Chills
- Rash

After this first phase, the disease progresses slowly and silently.

- Most often, severe symptoms (such as other infections) do not appear for many years.
- For this reason, it is very important to make sure your child gets tested on a regular basis if they have high-risk behaviors.

**It is possible to spread HIV at any stage of infection, even if a person with HIV has no symptoms of HIV.**

## Is information about my child’s HIV infection kept secure and private (confidential)?

- All health information we collect about your child is confidential.
- When you brought your child to the hospital, you signed a consent form. This form lists who has access to your child’s information.
- As with many other infections, we must tell the health department if we find that your child has HIV.

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Talk with your child's doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your child and HIV.

## Where can I find more information?

You can find more information by calling:

- The Children's Referral Line. Call 404-785-KIDS (5437), and ask to talk with the Infectious Disease doctor on call.
- Any county health department.
- The Department of Health Resources AIDS Information Line at 1-800-551-2728.

You may also visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at [cdc.gov/hiv/basics/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/index.html) to learn more about HIV.

*Children's Healthcare of Atlanta has not reviewed all of the sites listed as resources and does not make any representations regarding their content or accuracy. Children's Healthcare of Atlanta does not recommend or endorse any particular products, services or the content or use of any third party websites, or make any determination that such products, services or websites are necessary or appropriate for you or for the use in rendering care to patients. Children's Healthcare of Atlanta is not responsible for the content of any of the above-referenced sites or any sites linked to these Sites. Use of the links provided on this or other sites is at your sole risk.*

**This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.**

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