



Wyoming
Department
of Health

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Understanding HIV and AIDS

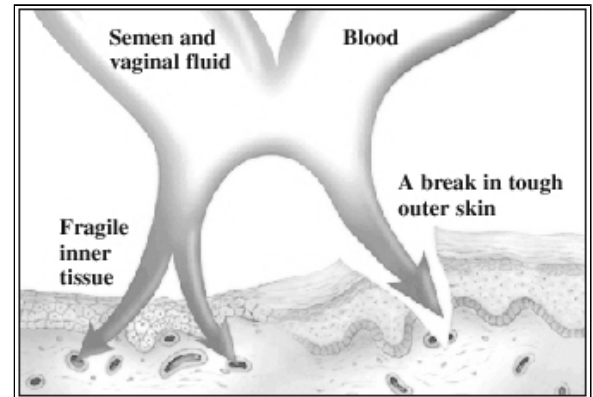
If you know how **HIV (human immunodeficiency virus)** can get into your body and what happens once it's there, you'll be better prepared to protect yourself or others against this virus. A person with HIV can look and feel perfectly healthy. But that person can give HIV to others as soon as he or she is infected with the virus.

Note: Having unsafe or unprotected sex or sharing needles put you at risk for HIV. Talk to your health care provider about ways to protect yourself or a loved one from getting HIV.

How HIV Enters the Body

HIV is carried in semen, vaginal fluid, blood, and breast milk.

- During sex, HIV can enter the body through the fragile tissue that lines the vagina, penis, anus, and mouth.
- During drug use, tattooing, or body piercing, the virus can enter the bloodstream through a shared needle.
- A mother who has HIV can infect her child during childbirth and through breastfeeding.



How HIV Infection Progresses

After HIV enters the body, it attacks the immune system in stages. A person with HIV can infect others once the virus enters the bloodstream.

HIV with No Symptoms: A person with HIV may have no symptoms for years. A positive blood test for HIV antibodies 6 weeks to 6 months after HIV enters the body may be the only sign of infection.

HIV with Symptoms: When the virus becomes active, symptoms begin to develop. These may include swollen lymph glands, fever, night sweats, diarrhea, skin rashes, and sores. Symptoms may be mild at first, and then slowly get worse and last for longer and longer periods.

AIDS: AIDS is the last stage of HIV infection. Diseases and cancers begin to overcome the body. It is these diseases, not the virus itself, that cause death. HIV may also attack the brain and nervous system, causing seizures, and loss of memory and body movement.