



What is HIV?

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is a viral infection that attacks and causes damage to the immune system. Most HIV infection is contracted through unprotected sex because HIV is present in body fluids such as blood, semen, anal mucus and vaginal fluid. It can also be transmitted through sharing injecting drug equipment and from mother to child at birth or through breastfeeding (but this is rare in the UK because pregnant women are screened in early pregnancy).

HIV can develop into AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), which comes in the late stages of HIV. It is when people with HIV also have a collection of illnesses due to their compromised immune system.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms are most likely to occur 2-6 weeks being infected with HIV – this period is called “primary HIV infection” or “sero-conversion” and at this time people can be highly infectious if they have unprotected sex. After sero-conversion people can be symptomless but they can still be infectious to others.

Symptoms can include:

- Fever
- Sore throat
- Rash
- Joint and muscle pain
- Fatigue
- Swollen glands

What about treatment?

At present there is no cure for HIV but there is effective medication called anti-retroviral therapy that controls the virus to such a level that it can't be detected in blood samples. Immune function is therefore preserved, therefore, controlled HIV results in a normal life expectancy. Furthermore, an undetectable viral load also means the virus can't be passed on during unprotected sex.

What can I do?

- Get tested – the most important way we can prevent complications in HIV is to diagnose and treat people as soon as possible after they have become infected. You can either order HIV test kits online or receive them through a sexual health clinic or your GP.
- Effective condom use. Free condoms for at risk people can be accessed via sexualhealthbromley.org.uk website.
- PrEP and PEPSE (pre and post exposure prophylaxis) – it can also be taken by an HIV negative person to prevent HIV acquisition via unprotected sex
- Needle exchange programmes organised through local pharmacies

To register with Bromley Well:
Freephone 0808 278 7898
Or register online:
www.bromleywell.org.uk/refer

Contact Lifestyle Support direct
07985 431484 / 07985 444210
or email
enquiry@bromleywell.org.uk



FURTHER RESOURCES

HIV community nurse Contact number 01689 86647	Support and help from community nurses in Bromley.
Terrence Higgins https://www.tht.org.uk Hepline 0808 802 1221	Charity that provides support for people living with HIV through helplines, community groups, running HIV workshops, providing testing and campaigning for people with HIV.
National AIDS trust https://www.nat.org.uk/about-hiv/understanding-hiv	Charity that can provide financial, and social support for those living with HIV, they also work with healthcare professionals to keep practices up to date.
Sexual Health Bromley https://www.sexualhealthbromley.co.uk/	For information about local HIV and sexual health services, prevention and free condom schemes.
HIV i-base https://i-base.info/	HIV treatment advice and advocacy - comprehensive details about anti-retroviral medication.
Sexual Health London https://www.shl.uk/	Free home STI/HIV testing.

References: National aids trust: [Understanding HIV | National AIDS Trust](#), Sexual health Bromley: [Sexual Health Bromley - Free sexual health services in Bromley](#), HIV treatment & advocacy: [HIV i-Base](#), Home testing: [Sexual Health London • SHL.UK](#), HIV & AIDS NHS: [HIV and AIDS - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#).

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