1. HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. HIV stands for “Human Immunodeficiency Virus” and it affects your body’s immune system. Normally, white blood cells fight bacteria, viruses, and other germs when they enter the body. HIV destroys certain white blood cells and stops your body from being able to fight infections.

2. There is no cure or vaccine for HIV or AIDS. There are only treatments that stop or slow the progression of HIV to AIDS. If left untreated, AIDS is fatal.

3. HIV symptoms can be treated. If you have HIV your healthcare provider can tell you what your options are, such as treatment with Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy (HAART). However, this only treats the symptoms of HIV. There is no cure for HIV or AIDS.

4. HIV is spread through contact with infected blood or other bodily fluids. For example:
   - Having unprotected sex (vaginal, anal, or oral).
   - Sharing needles or other equipment for injecting drugs.
   - Using unsterilized needles for tattooing, piercing, or acupuncture.

5. An HIV-positive mother can spread HIV to her baby during childbirth or breastfeeding. If you are HIV-positive and pregnant, talk to your healthcare provider about how you can keep your baby from being infected.

6. You cannot get HIV from casual contact, such as:
   - Talking, shaking hands, hugging, or kissing a person who has HIV.
   - Being coughed or sneezed on by a person with HIV.
   - Using towels, toilet seats, doorknobs, dishes, cutlery, swimming pools, or water fountains.
   - Through mosquitoes or other insects or animals.

7. Use condoms to protect yourself from HIV. Use condoms for vaginal, anal, and oral sex. Dental dams can also be used for oral sex. Birth control pills will not protect you from HIV. Use a condom even if you or your partner is on the pill.

Always use sterile needles and equipment for injection drug use, piercings, and tattoos. Do not share or borrow needles and equipment.
HIV AND AIDS

8 You can’t always tell if someone has HIV. HIV can only be detected through a blood test, and people with HIV may not have any symptoms for several years. The sooner you know you’re infected, the sooner you can start treatment and keep from spreading the virus to others.

9 If you think you might have HIV, get tested. HIV tests are not usually routinely offered. If you think you have HIV or could have been exposed, talk to your healthcare provider and ask to get tested. It’s the only way to know for sure if you’ve been infected. If you’re worried about confidentiality, ask your healthcare provider about options like anonymous HIV testing.

10 Anyone can get HIV, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or anything else. However, First Nations populations, especially women and youth under the age of 30, have higher rates of HIV infection than other Canadians. In 2006, 30% of First Nations people with HIV/AIDS were women (vs. 9% in the general population) and 19% were youth (vs. 15%).

There are many reasons for this, including poverty, difficulty getting healthcare, and having unprotected sex and using drugs. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, injection drug use is the most common way for First Nations people to get HIV. You can’t always tell if someone has HIV. HIV can only be detected through a blood test, and people with HIV may not have any symptoms for several years. The sooner you know you’re infected, the sooner you can start treatment and keep from spreading the virus to others.

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