HIV

Patient information, rights and rules of conduct. County Medical Officers' infection prevention sheet.

Why have you been given this information?

You have been, or are suspected of having been, infected with HIV. This sheet provides information about HIV, how it can be treated and what you need to do.

What is HIV?

HIV is a virus that affects your immune system. There is now medication that, if taken correctly, reduces the amount of the virus present in the body and potentially enables a person with HIV to live a long and healthy life. If the medication is taken correctly, the risk of infecting someone else with HIV is very low. There is no cure for the HIV infection; even with stable treatment, the virus is still present in the body. If an infected person does not receive treatment, their body's immune defence is weakened after a while and uncommon infections or cancer can develop. This latter stage is called AIDS. Most people with HIV today will never develop AIDS.

How is HIV spread?

Most people with HIV have acquired it as a result of unprotected sex, either vaginal sex or anal sex, and sometimes oral sex. Blood containing HIV is very infectious, and HIV can be transmitted from one person to another during a blood transfusion or a needlestick or if they use the same syringes or other injecting equipment. There is also a risk of infection if blood containing HIV comes into contact with mucous membranes in the eyes, nose or mouth or with a wound. Effective HIV treatment drastically reduces the risk of contagion, but does not completely eliminate the risk of infection. HIV can be transmitted from mother to child during pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding. If a mother is known to have HIV, it is possible almost completely to eliminate the risk to the child through medication and by not breastfeeding.

When is HIV not transmitted?

HIV is not passed on by hugging, kissing or cuddling. Tears, urine, faeces, vomit and catarrh containing no blood are not infectious either. Blood coming into contact with undamaged skin does not present a risk of infection.

Rights

According to the Swedish Communicable Diseases Act (Smittskyddslagen), testing for, clinic visits for and treatment of HIV are free.

You are also entitled to the psychosocial support you may need in order to deal with the disease. Your doctor should advise you on how to avoid putting others at risk of infection. You should not be treated less favourably because you are living with HIV. HIV is covered by the Swedish Discrimination Act (Diskrimineringslagen) under the issue of discrimination on the grounds of disability.

Professional activities

HIV infection will not normally result in restrictions to your studies or professional activities.

Pregnancy and breastfeeding

You can get help to enable you/your partner to conceive with a minimal risk of infection to your partner or your child. Women with HIV must not breastfeed.

Children with HIV

The parent/carer and child will receive information on protecting against infection via the doctor providing treatment, and this information will gradually be adapted as the child gets older. Children living with HIV have the same entitlement to childcare and schooling as other children, but may have special needs which have to be taken into account. The doctor providing the treatment or the County Medical Officer can provide the preschool with information if parents/carers grant consent to this. When the child starts school, the school healthcare service will be informed.

Condoms for vaginal sex, anal sex and oral sex

Condoms provide good protection against HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases and must always be worn throughout the entire sex session. It is probable that female condoms also work, but this method has not been evaluated scientifically.

Preventive drug therapy

If there is a chance that you have infected someone through sexual contact as a result of a condom not providing protection, through contact with your blood or in some other manner, it is possible to give preventive drug therapy, known as post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP). This must begin as quickly as possible. Contact the doctor providing treatment or an infection clinic/24-hour service as soon as possible.

Contact tracing

It is very important to identify people with HIV so that they can get treatment and prevent the infection being passed on to others. If you have HIV, you must, therefore, name the person or people who may have infected you or whom you may have infected. These may be people with whom you have had sex or other sexual contact, people with whom you have shared syringes, and in some cases family members. Contact tracing is performed by the doctor providing treatment, a counsellor or a nurse at the clinic. Anything you tell the contact tracing officer is confidential. The people you name will not be told who you are. They will only be told that they must get tested.

Blood must always be handled as infectious

- *Anyone who may come into contact with your blood while changing wound dressings or the like must wear gloves*
- *Bloody material must be well wrapped before being discarded. Clothes can be machine-washed.*
- *If anyone gets your blood in their eyes, nose or mouth, flush immediately with water. You must inform the person that your blood is infected with HIV and that they must get in touch with your doctor or with an infection clinic/24-hour service as soon as possible.*

Rules of conduct which you should follow so as not to infect anyone else

HIV is a public health hazard according to the Swedish Communicable Diseases Act. You are, therefore, obliged to protect other people from the risk of infection. If a risk of infection arises, you must disclose your illness to the other person. Below is a list of the rules of conduct for preventing infection based on the areas covered by the law. Most of these rules apply to anyone with HIV, while others are specific to your situation and may also change over time. It is the doctor treating you who decides which of the following rules of conduct should apply in your particular case.

1. *Restrictions may apply in respect of your work or participation in other activities where there is a risk of infection.*
2. *You must not donate blood, organs or tissue for transplantation.*
3. *If you use syringes/needles/other injecting equipment for medical purposes, you must not let other people use them.*
4. *If you use syringes/needles to inject drugs or the like, you must not let other people use them. You must not share mixing cups either. All injecting equipment must be stored and discarded so that it does not place others at risk of infection.*
5. *You must disclose that your blood is infectious when you seek dental or medical care where personnel may come into contact with your blood, for example while taking samples or performing surgery/procedures.*
6. *If you want a tattoo, to have your ears pierced or have any other treatment involving the use of sharp tools and where bleeding may occur, e.g. body piercing, you must disclose that your blood is infectious before the procedure is carried out.*
7. *You must inform your sexual partner that you are infected with HIV before sexual contact which presents a risk of transmission of HIV. There is a risk of such infection during all types of oral, vaginal and anal sex. As condoms can break, you must disclose your HIV status even if you are planning to use condoms. You must use condoms during sex where the penis is inserted in the vagina, the rectum or the mouth. During other sexual contact, a female condom must be used.*
8. *You must not share personal care items such as razors or toothbrushes with other people.*
9. *You must attend the repeat visits which your doctor considers necessary.*

If you have been given a rule of conduct which you think is wrong, you can contact the County Medical Officer in your county.