

HIV – person with stable HIV treatment; patient information

County Medical Officers' infection prevention sheet

Why have you been given this information?

You have an HIV infection that is being treated with antiretroviral therapy (ART) and your doctor has assessed that your treatment is stable. Stable HIV treatment means:

- The level of virus in your blood must always be undetectable.
- You are careful to take the medicine regularly as prescribed.
- You go to your doctor regularly to check the level of virus and for treatment, usually 2–4 times a year or according to your doctor's assessment.

What is HIV?

HIV is a virus that affects your immune system. There is now medication that, if taken correctly, reduces the amount of virus present in the body and potentially enables a person with HIV to live a long and healthy life. If an HIV infection is controlled through stable treatment, there is no risk of infection in conjunction with sexual contact. There is no cure for HIV infection. Even with stable treatment, the virus is still present in the body.

How is HIV spread?

Most people with HIV acquired it as a result of unprotected sex, either vaginal sex or anal sex, and sometimes oral sex. Blood containing HIV is infectious and HIV can be transmitted from one person to another during a blood transfusion, needle-stick, or if they use the same syringes or other injecting equipment. However, if HIV is controlled through stable treatment, the amount of virus in the blood is reduced so much so the infection is not transmitted through sexual activity. Regarding the risk of blood infection in conjunction with, for example, needle-sticks, cuts or sharing syringes, the risk of infection from a person with stable HIV treatment has not been studied to the same extent and therefore infectivity cannot be completely ruled out. HIV can be transmitted from mother to child during pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding. If a mother is known to have HIV, it is possible to almost completely eliminate the risk to the child through medication and 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.

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 minimal risk of infection to your child. To protect the child, a pregnant woman with HIV has an obligation to inform the healthcare services about the HIV infection early on in the pregnancy so that preventive actions can be taken. Women with HIV are advised not to breast-feed.

Children with HIV

The parent/carer and child will receive infection protection information 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 treatment, or the County Medical Officer can provide the preschool with information if parents/carers grant consent. When the child starts school, the pupil 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. When your HIV treatment is stable, you have no obligation to use a condom during sexual intercourse, but it is still recommended to do so in order to protect against other sexually transmitted infections.

Blood must always be handled as infectious

- Anyone who may come in contact with your blood while changing wound dressings or similar must wear gloves.
- If someone comes in contact with your blood, for example, through an open wound, needle-stick or cut, you must inform that person that the blood may be infected with HIV and that he/she must contact the Infectious Diseases Clinic/hotline for assessment as soon as possible.

Rules of conduct which you must 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 apply to you.

1. You must not donate blood, organs or tissue for transplantation.
2. If you use syringes/needles/other injecting equipment for medical purposes, you must not let other people use them.
3. If you use syringes/needles to inject drugs or similar, 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.
4. When you go for medical or dental care, you must inform the staff that you have a "blood infection" before undergoing any intervention where there is a higher risk of needle-stick or cut injuries, for example, during surgical procedures. For routine, simpler medical and dental examinations, including blood tests and injections, you do not need to inform the staff.
5. Do not share sharp/cutting personal care items such as razors with anyone.
6. You must attend the follow-up 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/region.