

FEBRUARY 2013 • MEMBERS

HIV and AIDS

2013—30 Year Anniversary

Still a big concern

HIV was first discovered in 1983. By 1984 we knew that it caused AIDS. Since then, over half a million Americans have died of HIV.¹ Today, 1.1 million are living with the infection, and almost one-fifth of them don't even know it.¹

In 2010 alone,

- Almost 48,300 more Americans were diagnosed with HIV.¹
- The U.S. government spent more than \$513 million on HIV education, prevention, research, and surveillance.¹

These numbers don't even begin to reflect the pain and misery caused by HIV nor the cost of treating those with the disease. So it's no surprise that HIV is still a huge public concern 30 years after being discovered.

Who gets HIV infection?

Anyone can get HIV. Men, women, children, and babies have HIV. African Americans, whites, Hispanics, Asians, and people of other ethnic backgrounds get it. People with HIV live all across the country. Some are rich and famous, and some are poor and unknown.

Of those diagnosed in 2010,¹

- 64% were men who had sex with another man.
- 27% were heterosexual men and women.
- 8% were people who injected drugs.
- <1% were babies who got HIV from their mothers during pregnancy, birth, or breastfeeding.
- 46% were African American.
- 29% were white.
- 20% were Hispanic.

How do you know if you have HIV?

The only way to find out if you have HIV is to be tested. The initial screening test uses either a blood sample or an oral fluid sample. If the initial test is positive, it is followed up with a confirmatory test.

Knowing if you have HIV is very important. Treatment can fight the virus and help keep your immune system strong. But, you can't be treated if you don't know you're infected. And, you won't know if you're infected unless you get tested.



What is HIV?

HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. The virus is most often spread from one person to another during sex. HIV causes an infection that cannot be cured. Without treatment, the infected person will die from the complications.

HIV can silently destroy the body's immune system over time. There are no symptoms while this is happening. When enough of the immune system is destroyed, the person begins to get very sick with unusual infections or certain types of cancer. That is, the patient progresses to AIDS.

Protect yourself and your loved ones

The most important thing you can do to protect against HIV is to practice safe sex. Using a condom helps protect against HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

Another very important thing is to get tested. And if you test positive, get treated. Treatment lowers the amount of virus. A low amount of virus reduces the chance of spreading HIV to your sex partner and to your unborn baby (if you're pregnant).

For more information about how to protect yourself and your loved ones, follow the links provided in the "Additional information" section.

More about HIV testing options

There are 4 basic options for HIV screening:

1. Your doctor orders the test and tells you where to go to have the sample collected. The sample is sent to a laboratory. The laboratory tests the sample and confirms any positive results. The laboratory sends the result back to your doctor.
2. A rapid test is done at your doctor's office or at a clinic. If it's positive, a sample has to be sent to a laboratory for confirmation. You get the final result from your doctor or clinic.
3. You collect a blood sample at home (finger stick) and send it to a laboratory. The laboratory tests the sample, confirming positive results. You call a toll-free number to get your results.
4. You buy an over-the-counter test kit. You collect an oral fluid sample, run the test, and read the test results in the privacy of your home. Positive results MUST be confirmed with another test performed at a medical facility.

What are the current testing recommendations?

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) currently recommends HIV screening for pregnant women and people at high risk of HIV. But, most experts think HIV screening should be widespread. It shouldn't be limited to those who are at high risk. Thus, in November 2012, the USPSTF drafted new recommendations which would recommend screening²:

- All adolescents and adults 15-65 years old
- Younger and older people who are at high risk
- All pregnant women including those whose HIV status is unknown at time of labor.

A decision on whether to adopt the draft recommendations may be out soon.

Why are the USPSTF recommendations important?

The USPSTF recommendations determine when HIV screening is covered under the Affordable Care Act. According to the Act, insurance companies have to provide USPSTF recommended services without cost-sharing.³ This means the insurance company pays the full cost. The patient doesn't have to pay anything.

Additional information

HIV prevention

- avert.org/aids-hiv-prevention.htm
- cdcnpin.org/scripts/hiv/prevent.asp

HIV testing

- www.fda.gov/BiologicsBloodVaccines/SafetyAvailability/HIVHomeTestKits/ucm126460.htm
- hivtest.cdc.gov/faq.aspx#screening

References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. HIV/AIDS. <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/surveillance/basic.htm>. Accessed January 7, 2013.
2. U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. Draft Recommendation Statement: Screening for HIV. <http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf13/hiv/hivdraftrec.htm>. Accessed January 7, 2013.
3. U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommendations. HealthCare.gov website. <http://www.healthcare.gov/law/resources/regulations/prevention/taskforce.html>. Accessed January 10, 2013.