



ashm

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# HIV Patient FACT SHEET

*Recently your doctor conducted an HIV Test and the result was positive. This means you have been infected with HIV, but does not mean you have AIDS. This result may be a shock and you probably have lots of questions that you want answered.*

*Your doctor will be able to provide some answers. The organisations listed on the back of this sheet can give you more information or help you contact other people with HIV who have been through this experience.*

*The most important thing to remember is that you are not alone. Your doctor and these organisations can provide you with information and support.*

## ► What is HIV?

HIV is short for the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. It is the virus that can cause AIDS without treatment. Once HIV enters the body it attacks the immune system, breaking down its ability to fight disease and infections. If left untreated, HIV will lead to AIDS, which stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. AIDS develops when the immune system can no longer function to fight disease or infection.

## ► How is HIV spread?

HIV can be spread through unsafe sex, through the sharing of needles and other drug-injecting equipment, and through other blood-to-blood contact. It can also be transmitted from mother to baby during pregnancy, during labour or afterwards through breastfeeding. It is important to use condoms consistently during sex, to avoid reusing drug-injecting equipment and to prevent any blood-to-blood contact. HIV is not transmitted through sharing eating utensils or food or by touch.

## ► Monitoring your health

In order to discover how your body is coping with HIV it is crucial to monitor your health through blood tests during check-ups with your doctor. A T-cell or CD4 cell count gives an indication of the current strength of your immune system (by measuring the number of CD4 cells) and a viral load test indicates how much

virus is in your system. It is important to note changes in these indicators so that drug treatments can be started or changed when needed.

## ► Treatment

HIV can be treated effectively. A range of drugs is now available that can control the virus and limit the amount of damage it can do to your immune system. These are called antiretroviral drugs and many people infected with HIV now have a greatly increased life expectancy due to these drugs. The aim of this treatment is to reduce your viral load (the amount of HIV in your blood) and to allow your immune system to repair any damage that has occurred (by increasing your CD4 cell count). Antiretroviral drugs are given in combination of three different drugs usually. To find out if and when it is necessary to begin treatment, you must work with your doctor to monitor your health.

## ► Your doctor

Your doctor has an important role to play. Your doctor is a good person to talk to about HIV in a private and confidential manner. She or he may be authorised to prescribe antiretroviral drugs. Authorised prescribers have undergone training on how to manage HIV, which allows them to prescribe antiretroviral drugs subsidised under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). If your doctor cannot prescribe HIV medications, then

she or he can refer you to a doctor who can. If necessary, the Australasian Society for HIV Medicine (ASHM) can help your doctor locate a HIV specialist in your area.

## ► Confidentiality

Your HIV test result is personal. You do not have to tell anyone straight away, however, you are required to take precautions to prevent transmission of HIV to others through sexual or blood contact (including injecting drug use). In Western Australia, you are also advised to inform sexual partners that you have HIV before having sex due to potential legal consequences. It is a legal requirement to do this in some other Australian states. There is no legal requirement to tell any of your treating doctors, nurses, dentists or other healthcare providers that you have HIV. However, it is advisable that you do this so that you get the best treatment for your needs. If you decide to tell any of these professionals, they are required to keep that information confidential unless you give your

consent or unless this is required by law, court order or in exceptional circumstances. Unfortunately you cannot donate any blood or body fluids and if you are a health care worker with HIV you must not perform "exposure prone" procedures. If you have been performing these procedures your treating doctor is required to advise the WA public health authorities.

## ► Someone to talk to

You may like to start thinking about who you can talk to. As a person newly diagnosed with HIV, it is important to ask questions and find the kind of support that suits you. HIV/AIDS organisations offer a range of information and services including counselling, peer support or simply someone to talk to confidentially. They can also refer you to other services that may be more suitable. Remember, you are not alone. These are just a few organisations and groups that exist to provide you with information and support.

### WA AIDS COUNCIL

664 Murray Street  
West Perth WA 6005  
Ph: (08) 9482 0000  
Fax: (08) 9482 0001

Provides education, counselling, advocacy, support and care services to enhance the quality of life of people living with and/or affected by HIV/AIDS.

### AIDSLINE:

Ph: (08) 9482 0044

(Telephone information and counselling on HIV/AIDS issues, Mon – Fri 8.30am – 5.00pm)

### MEN'S LINE:

Ph: (08) 9322 8401  
1800 671 130 Toll free (regional)

Email: [waac@wa aids.com](mailto:waac@wa aids.com)  
Web: [www.wa aids.com](http://www.wa aids.com)

### FREMANTLE HOSPITAL

Infectious Diseases (B2 Clinic)  
Level 2, B Block, Alma Street  
Fremantle WA 6160

Ph: (08) 9431 2149

*Provides an essential specialist clinical service for all STIs, HIV and viral hepatitis. A clinical psychologist and social work service are also available. Medical practitioner referral is required for HIV and viral hepatitis; patients requiring assessment and management of STIs may self-refer.*

### THE LIVING CENTRE

Ph: (08) 9470 4931  
Fax (08) 9361 9454  
Email: [pastoralcare@westnet.com.au](mailto:pastoralcare@westnet.com.au)  
*Provides services and advocates for people living with and/or affected by HIV/AIDS.*

### ROYAL PERTH HOSPITAL

Department of Clinical Immunology  
Wellington Street Campus  
Wellington Street, Perth WA 6000

Ph: (08) 9224 2899

Provides essential specialist medical care for HIV-positive people. Medical practitioner referral is required. A social worker is available.

### SEXUAL HEALTH CLINIC

Level 4, Ainslie House  
48 Murray Street, Perth WA 6000  
Ph: (08) 9224 2178

A specialist management service for all STIs. Provides professional, public and community education.

This fact sheet is produced by the:

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Spanish, Thai and Vietnamese.

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