

APPENDIX 1

Patient information – Natural history and transmission of HIV

What is HIV?	Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is the virus that causes AIDS.
What is AIDS?	Acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS).
How does HIV affect people?	<p>When a person first contracts HIV, a flu-like illness may occur. In most cases, without treatment, HIV slowly causes damage to the immune system. The body becomes less able to fight infection and illness.</p> <p>As HIV disease advances, a person may develop AIDS. An AIDS diagnosis generally means that the immune system is severely weakened and that life-threatening illnesses may occur. These illnesses include infections (e.g. pneumonia) and cancers.</p> <p>Recently, more effective treatments have become available. However, it is unknown whether these treatments can indefinitely delay the decline of the immune system. Before these treatments became available it took an average of 8–12 years after initial HIV infection for AIDS to develop.</p>
How is HIV monitored?	<p>Regular check-ups and blood tests are conducted to monitor the progress of the disease:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • viral load indicates viral activity • CD4 cell count indicates extent of damage to the immune system.
How many people have HIV?	In Australia in 2006, 998 new HIV infections were reported, bringing the total number of people living with HIV nationwide to 16,675.
How is HIV transmitted?	HIV is present in certain bodily fluids of people with the infection (i.e. blood, semen, vaginal fluids and breast milk). It may be passed on by sexual contact, any activity that allows a bodily fluid to enter the blood stream via a break in the skin, or from mother to child. It is not passed on through normal household contact or by kissing.
How is HIV transmission prevented?	<p>HIV transmission is significantly reduced by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • safe sex, which is any sexual activity that does not allow the transfer of one person's body fluids (blood, semen, vaginal fluid) into another. This means using condoms and water-based lubricants for any vaginal or anal intercourse and avoiding oral sex if there are cuts or sores on the genitals or in the mouth. If sex toys are to be shared, they should be covered by a condom (Chapter 3) • safe injecting using only sterile equipment (needles, syringes, swabs, spoons, filters, tourniquets and water) to inject each time or thoroughly cleaning equipment where this is not possible. Alternatively, drugs can be smoked, snorted or swallowed (Chapter 3 and Appendix 4) • interventions during pregnancy and labour, and avoidance of breast-feeding • standard precautions (Chapter 13).