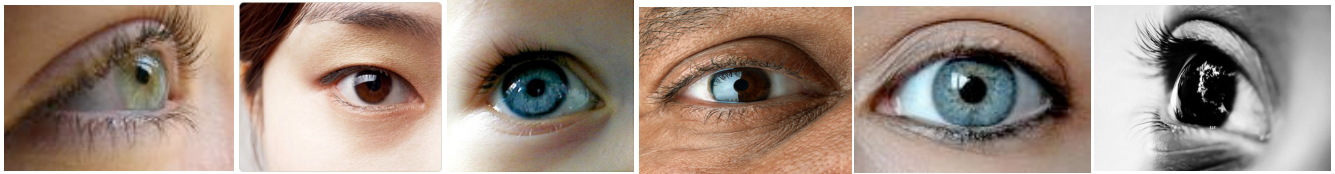*Fact Sheet*

HIV/AIDS

What is HIV?

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is the virus that causes AIDS. This virus may be passed from one person to another when infected blood, semen, or vaginal secretions come in contact with an uninfected person's broken skin or mucous membranes. In addition, infected pregnant women can pass HIV to their baby during pregnancy or delivery, as well as through breast-feeding. People with HIV have what is called HIV infection. Some of these people will develop AIDS as a result of their HIV infection.[1]

What is AIDS?

AIDS stands for **A**cquired **I**mmunodeficiency **S**yndrome.

Acquired – means that the disease is not hereditary but develops after birth from contact with a disease-causing agent (in this case, HIV).

Immunodeficiency – means that the disease is characterized by a weakening of the immune system.

Syndrome – refers to a group of symptoms that collectively indicate or characterize a disease. In the case of AIDS this can include the development of certain infections and/or cancers, as well as a decrease in the number of certain cells in a person's immune system.

A diagnosis of AIDS is made by a physician using specific clinical or laboratory standards.[2]

■What are the symptoms and potential consequences of HIV/AIDS infection?

There are some symptoms of HIV/AIDS, but the only way to know whether you are infected is to be tested for HIV. You cannot rely on symptoms alone because many people who are infected with HIV do not have symptoms for many years. Someone can look and feel healthy but can still be infected. In fact, one quarter of the HIV-infected persons in the United States do not know that they are infected.[3]

■Common Warning Signs of HIV/AIDS:

- Rapid Weight Loss
- Dry Cough
- Fever/Night Sweats
- Profound and Unexplained Fatigue
- Swollen Lymph Glands
- Unusual Blemishes on or Under Skin
- Diarrhea lasting more than a week
- Memory Loss and Depression[4]

■How do people get HIV/AIDS?

HIV can be transmitted from an infected person to another through:

- Blood (including menstrual blood)
- Semen
- Vaginal Secretions
- Breast Milk

Blood contains the highest concentration of the virus, followed by semen, followed by vaginal fluids, followed by breast milk.

Activities That Allow HIV Transmission:

- Unprotected Sexual Contact
- Direct Blood Contact, including injection drug needles, blood transfusions, accidents in health care settings, or certain blood products
- Mother to Baby (Before or During Birth, or through Breast Milk)[5]

◼Risk Factors of HIV/AIDS Transmission:

You may be at increased risk for infection if you have:

- injected drugs or steroids, during which equipment (such as needles, syringes, cotton, water) and blood were shared with others
- had unprotected vaginal, anal, or oral sex (that is, sex without using condoms) with men who have sex with men, multiple partners, or anonymous partners
- exchanged sex for drugs or money
- been given a diagnosis of, or been treated for, hepatitis, tuberculosis (TB), or a sexually transmitted disease (STD) such as syphilis
- received a blood transfusion or clotting factor during 1978–1985
- had unprotected sex with someone who has any of the risk factors listed above

◼Preventing Transmission:

Your risk of getting HIV or passing it to someone else depends on several things. Do you know what they are? You might want to talk to someone who knows about HIV.

You can also do the following:

- Abstain from sex (do not have oral, anal, or vaginal sex) until you are in a relationship with only one person, are having sex with only each other, and each of you knows the other's HIV status.
    - If both you and your partner have HIV, use condoms to prevent other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and possible infection with a different strain of HIV.
    - If only one of you has HIV, use a latex condom and lubricant every time you have sex.

- If you have, or plan to have, more than one sex partner, consider the following:
    - Get Tested!
    - Talk about HIV and other STDs with each partner before you have sex.
    - Learn as much as you can about each partner's past behavior (sex and drug use), and consider the risks to your health before you have sex.
    - Ask your partners if they have recently been tested for HIV; encourage those who have not been tested to do so.
    - Use a latex condom and lubricant every time you have sex.

- If you think you may have been exposed to another STD such as gonorrhea, syphilis, or Chlamydia trachomatis infection, get treatment. These diseases can increase your risk of getting HIV.
    - Get vaccinated against hepatitis B virus.
- Even if you think you have low risk for HIV infection, get tested whenever you have a regular medical check-up.
- Do not inject illicit drugs (drugs not prescribed by your doctor). You can get HIV through needles, syringes, and other works if they are contaminated with the blood of someone who has HIV. Drugs also cloud your mind, which may result in riskier sex.
- If you do inject drugs, do the following:
    - Use only clean needles, syringes, and other works.
    - Never share needles, syringes, or other works.
    - Be careful not to expose yourself to another person's blood.
    - Get tested for HIV test at least once a year.
    - Consider getting counseling and treatment for your drug use.
    - Get vaccinated against hepatitis A and B viruses.
- Do not have sex when you are taking drugs or drinking alcohol because being high can make you more likely to take risks.

◼Is there a treatment for HIV/AIDS?

While there is currently no cure or vaccine for HIV/AIDS, people living with HIV disease can benefit from an array of antiretroviral therapies and other services that have proven effective against it. HIV is now managed as a chronic, long-term disease for many Americans.