

## How you get HIV/AIDS

Which body fluids contain HIV?

HIV is a virus that lives in blood and other fluids in the body. Moving these fluids from one person to another can cause infection. HIV can be spread three main ways - through sexual contact, sharing needles, and from mother to child during pregnancy, or breastfeeding.



### Fluids that are known to have high amounts of HIV include:

Blood	Vaginal fluids
Semen	Rectal mucous
Breast milk	

HIV has been found in small amounts in **tears, saliva, and urine**, but these fluids have **NOT** been shown to spread HIV infection. HIV has **NOT** been found in human sweat.

**Healthcare workers** may be exposed to some other bodily fluids with high amounts of HIV, including:

*Amniotic fluid* – around a fetus during pregnancy

*Cerebrospinal fluid* – around the brain and spinal cord

*Synovial fluid* – in the joints between bones

### How is HIV spread through body fluids?

HIV is spread through body fluids in three main ways:

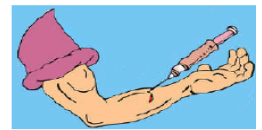
- Sexual contact
- Pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding
- Drug abuse with needles

**During sexual contact** - HIV is spread through the lining of the vagina, penis, rectum, or mouth. During vaginal, oral, or anal sexual intercourse, the lining of these

areas may be damaged, allowing HIV to enter a person's bloodstream. This damage is often not noticed.

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), like chlamydia and gonorrhea, cause tiny breaks in the lining of the vagina, mouth, rectum, and penis. This can allow HIV to enter the bloodstream. In the case of STDs that cause open sores (like herpes or syphilis), HIV can enter through the sores.

**During pregnancy, childbirth (when the baby passes through the birth canal), or breastfeeding**— HIV is spread through infected blood or breast milk. (This is known as mother-to-child transmission.)



**As a result of drug use with needles**— HIV is spread through sharing needles and “works” (e.g., cookers, spoons, bottle caps, cotton/filters, water) that can get dirty with infected blood.

**VERY** rarely HIV can be spread through:

- a blood transfusion with infected blood.
- at work (mainly healthcare workers coming into contact with infected blood or other fluids).
- an organ transplant.



Be sure to get answers to any questions you have about HIV/AIDS. Your public health department and health care provider can help.

Text adapted from materials on the AIDS.gov website.  
Handout by Healthy Roads Media ([www.healthyroadsmedia.org](http://www.healthyroadsmedia.org)),  
Funding from Division of Specialized Information Services of the  
National Library of Medicine. It can be freely distributed under the  
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License  
(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/us>)

Last reviewed 2010