

## FAQ about HIV infection

### What is HIV?

HIV infection is a viral disease which is transmitted sexually through HIV-infected blood and from mother to child. Left untreated, the disease will weaken the immune system, which can cause various infections. Unless it is treated, the disease can be fatal. HIV is widespread worldwide, but HIV infection is more common in some countries.

### Should I take an HIV test?

If you come from a country where HIV is widespread, you will be offered a free HIV test. This test is voluntary. If it is possible you have been exposed to HIV (see How can I get HIV?), you can ask to take a free HIV test.

With today's effective treatments, most people with HIV infection can live a long life with a reduced risk of serious disease. It is an advantage to know whether you have been infected with HIV, so that you can be treated as soon as possible. Knowing you are HIV-infected also enables you to avoid infecting other people.

### How can I get HIV?

HIV can be found in blood and body fluids in those who are infected. Sexual contact is the most common infection path and infection can occur during unprotected vaginal/anal intercourse. Anal intercourse without a condom is considered to be the highest risk. The risk of HIV infection increases if you have another sexually transmitted disease.

HIV can also be transmitted through substance abuse by sharing syringes, needles and other user equipment. Infection is also known to have occurred through blood transmission before blood donors were tested for HIV. In rare cases, HIV can be transmitted through blood coming into contact with mucous membranes or visibly damaged skin.

The risk of infection being transmitted from mother to child during pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding is around 30%. However, this risk can be reduced to less than 1% by treating the mother and child during the first few weeks after the birth. All pregnant women in Norway are offered an HIV test.

### What are the symptoms of HIV?

Most people who become infected show no symptoms until several years after infection. About 2-4 weeks after they become infected, some people (about half of those infected) get what is known as a primary infection, which will normally pass within three weeks. The symptoms can include fever, influenza-like symptoms with a sore throat, rash and swollen lymph nodes. After a number of years, the disease can give rise to a number of complaints which are due to various infections which you can get because your weakened immune system has been damaged.

### **How can I protect myself from getting HIV?**

The most important step you can take to protect yourself from HIV infection is to use a condom during vaginal and anal intercourse. Clean syringes and needles must be used by everyone who uses syringes. You should never share syringes and needles with other people.

### **What sort of follow-up will I receive if my HIV test is positive?**

When you take an HIV test, you will be offered a discussion meeting and advice. If your HIV test is positive (i.e. you are infected), you will be referred to a specialist in infection medicine.

The treatment is free. It is recommended that you start treatment as soon as possible. There is currently no curative treatment for HIV which can eradicate the virus. Treatment is aimed at the ability of the virus to reproduce itself in the body. Most people who are on treatment are able to live a normal life. The treatment is life-long.