

## Center on Psychiatric Disability and Co-Occurring Medical Conditions

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### Transcript for Podcast: Preventing HIV/AIDS: Understanding the Risks and Tests

[Host]: Thank you for visiting the Center on Psychiatric Disability and Co-Occurring Medical Conditions. This recording is part of our Health and Wellness Podcast Library. For more information about our Center, please visit us our web site at [WWW.CMHSRP.UIC.EDU/HEALTH](http://WWW.CMHSRP.UIC.EDU/HEALTH).

[Ms. Pashka] Hello, my name is Nikki Pashka. Today, we're talking with my colleague, Dr. Lisa Razzano, who will provide basic facts about HIV and AIDS to help us better understand them. Dr. Razzano will also answer some of the most frequently asked questions about HIV testing.

Dr. Razzano, can you start by telling us what HIV and AIDS are?

[Dr. Razzano] Yes, I'd be glad to. HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. This virus attacks an important part of the immune system called T-cells. A person's body needs these cells to fight infections and diseases. But HIV invades these cells, uses the cells to make more copies of itself, and then, destroys the healthy cells. Over time, HIV can destroy so many of a person's T-cells that the body can no longer fight infections or diseases. When this happens, HIV infection can lead to AIDS, which stands for acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

[Ms. Pashka] Who can become infected with HIV?

[Dr. Razzano] HIV does not discriminate. Anyone of any age, race, sex, or sexual orientation can be infected. HIV is most commonly transmitted through direct contact with fluids such as blood, breast milk, vaginal secretions, semen, and pre-seminal fluids. You do not get HIV just by touching or being touched by infected blood or body fluids. You do not get HIV from contacting someone's saliva, or the spit, in their

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mouth. The virus must get inside the body and into the blood. The virus gets inside through an open cut or sore on a person's skin or on a mucous membrane. These membranes are found in the penis, vagina, anus, rectum, mouth, and eyes. Babies can also become infected by drinking their mothers' breast milk.

It is important to understand these risk factors in order to prevent infection.

[Ms. Pashka] What are some of the risk factors?

[Dr. Razzano] Some risk factors include: having unprotected sex, which means sex without using a condom or other barrier. Someone may become infected when having vaginal, anal, or oral sex with an infected partner. The virus can enter the body through mouth sores or small tears that sometimes develop in the rectum or vagina during sexual activity. Anal sex is more risky than vaginal sex. The risk increases if someone has multiple sexual partners. Having other sexually transmitted diseases can also put a person at greater risk because open sores or cuts allow for an exchange of fluids.

Other risk factors include sharing needles, syringes, rinse water, or other equipment used to prepare drugs for injection. Being born to an infected mother or breastfeeding are ways HIV is spread from mother to child.

[Ms. Pashka] Who should get tested and why?

[Dr. Razzano] Unfortunately, many people are infected with HIV but don't know it. Anyone between the ages of 13 and 64 should be tested at least once. Anyone who is sexually active should get tested every year for HIV.

[Ms. Pashka] How do people get tested for HIV?

[Dr. Razzano] HIV tests are typically done in one of two ways—by testing the blood or oral fluids. A urine test can also be performed, but it is less reliable.

The blood test is performed by pricking the finger to produce a blood sample or by drawing blood from a person's arm. Blood tests can take a few days to get results. An oral test is used to test oral fluid which is found in the mouth along the cheeks and gums. This fluid is different from saliva. Results from this type of test are often available much quicker—sometimes in

as little as 20 minutes. This test can mistakenly lead people to believe that HIV is transmitted through oral fluids and saliva, which is not the case.

It's important to understand that HIV tests don't actually test for the virus itself. Instead, they test for the antibodies the body creates to fight HIV infection. When HIV enters the body, the immune system starts to produce antibodies or chemicals that help the body to fight viruses and bacteria. In the case of HIV, the presence of these antibodies is used to tell whether a person is infected with the virus. In other words, most HIV tests look for the HIV antibodies rather than looking for HIV itself.

[Ms. Pashka] How long should someone wait after possible exposure before getting tested?

[Dr. Razzano] It can take a few weeks or even months for the body to produce HIV antibodies. It's recommended that testing occur at 3 and 6 months after possible exposure. There are no guarantees, however, as to when an individual will produce enough antibodies to be detected by an HIV test.

[Ms. Pashka] If someone's results come back negative—does that mean their partner is negative, too?

[Dr. Razzano] No. There is still a possibility that a person's partner may be infected with HIV and should seek testing to determine their own status.

[Ms. Pashka] To recap, what are some tips for people who want to lead a healthy lifestyle?

[Dr. Razzano] Practice safer sex. This means either avoiding sexual activity if you yourself are infected, or staying in a long-term, mutually monogamous relationship with an uninfected partner. The next best thing is to limit the number of sexual partners one has, which reduces the odds of coming into contact with someone who is HIV positive. Correct condom use—both for females and males—every time one engages in sexual activity can also lower the risk for HIV and other STDs.

[Ms. Pashka] Dr. Razzano, I want to thank you for giving us this information about risk factors and HIV testing. For our listeners, learn more about the information mentioned in this podcast at [www.aids.gov](http://www.aids.gov).

[Host]: Thank you for listening. You can listen to additional podcasts or download a transcript by visiting us at <http://www.cmhsrp.uic.edu/health/index.asp> and clicking the link for Podcast Library.

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