HIV/AIDS Facts

What is HIV? HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus, which is the virus that causes HIV infection. The abbreviation “HIV” can refer to the virus or to HIV infection.

What does AIDS stands for? Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome. The term AIDS is used to acknowledge the most advanced stage of HIV infection.

What happens to the body with an infection? HIV attacks and destroys the infection-fighting CD4 cells of the immune system. Loss of CD4 cells makes it difficult for the body to fight infections and certain cancers. Without treatment, HIV can gradually destroy the immune system and will advance to AIDS.

How is HIV spread? HIV is spread through contact with certain body fluids from a person infected with HIV. These body fluids include: Blood, Semen, Pre-seminal fluid, Vaginal fluids, Rectal fluids and Breast milk

You can’t get HIV by shaking hands or hugging a person infected with HIV.

You also can’t get HIV from contact with objects such as dishes, toilet seats, or doorknobs used by a person with HIV.

What is the treatment for HIV? The use of HIV medicines to treat HIV infection is called antiretroviral therapy (ART). ART involves taking a combination of HIV medicines (called an HIV regimen) every day. (HIV medicines are often called antiretrovirals or ARVs.) ART prevents HIV from multiplying and reduces the level of HIV in the body. Having less HIV in the body protects the immune system and prevents HIV infection from advancing to AIDS. ART can’t cure HIV, but it can help people infected with HIV live longer, healthier lives. ART also reduces the risk of HIV transmission.

What are the symptoms of HIV/AIDS?

Soon after infection with HIV, some people have flu-like symptoms, such as fever, headache, or rash. The symptoms may come and go for a month or two after infection. After this earliest stage of HIV infection, HIV continues to multiply but at very low levels. More severe symptoms of HIV infection, such as chronic diarrhea, rapid weight loss, and other signs of opportunistic infections, infection-related cancers that occur create a weakened immune systems.

Without treatment, HIV can advance to AIDS. The time it takes for HIV to advance to AIDS varies, but it can take 10 years or more.