

- ✓ After participating in part 2, you will be able to
 - Understand ways to lower your risk of getting HIV/AIDS
 - Understand the basics of how HIV affects the body
 - Understand how HIV is treated

What will be asked of you?

You will be asked to look at your own behavior, both past and present, and think about the risks you may run or may have run for getting HIV. You will need to confront any fears you have about getting tested for HIV. An important part of sobriety is attending to your physical health, and one way you can do this is to learn about diseases such as HIV/AIDS that pose a serious threat to people's health today.



Part 1: Understanding HIV and AIDS

What is HIV and AIDS? HIV is short for *human immunodeficiency virus*; it causes *acquired immune deficiency syndrome* (AIDS). HIV is transmitted through bodily fluids such as blood, semen, and vaginal fluids. It is the most serious and deadly sexually transmitted disease today.

Being infected with HIV does *not* always mean AIDS will develop. It does mean, though, that a person will be infected with the virus for the rest of his or her life. People with HIV can infect others, too, if they do things that transmit the virus.

No one can tell by looking at someone whether he or she has HIV infection. Someone can look healthy and still be infected.

The only way to know if HIV is present is by taking an HIV *antibody* test. (An *antibody* is a protein produced by the immune system as a response to a foreign agent in the body.) Two tests are used to learn if a person is infected with HIV. Each one examines blood samples for the presence of HIV antibodies. A more recent test has been developed that uses saliva rather than blood, but it is more expensive and not as common.



LEARNER OBJECTIVES FOR PART 1:

You will

- Understand the extent and danger of the HIV/AIDS problem in the United States
- Understand how HIV testing works and why it is important
- Understand how HIV is spread and how it can't be spread
- Judge your own risk for getting HIV

1. The ELISA (enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay) test is the most common antibody blood test. A positive result means the person may be infected with HIV.
2. If the ELISA test is positive, another test, called the Western blot, is performed to double-check the results. If the Western blot is positive, the person is considered to be infected with HIV, or *HIV-positive*.

Negative results may mean the person is not infected, or that not enough time has gone by since HIV entered the body for it to produce HIV antibodies, which are what the tests look for. The period between the initial infection and the production of antibodies is usually six to twelve weeks. An infected person can still transmit HIV during this time.

HIV is short for *human immunodeficiency virus*; it causes *acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS)*.

Statistics on HIV and AIDS

- Nearly one million Americans are living with HIV/AIDS. At least a third of them are estimated as having AIDS.
- For men, about 25 percent of new AIDS cases occur through injection drug use.
- Young people (under the age of twenty-five) make up at least half of all new HIV infections, and most of them are infected through heterosexual sex.
- The percentage of AIDS cases among women has risen dramatically since 1986. Nearly half of all adults living with HIV/AIDS worldwide are women.
- African Americans and Hispanics represented half of all AIDS cases reported among males and 75 percent among females in 2001. AIDS is the leading cause of death for African American men ages twenty-five to forty-four.

Source: National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease *Fact Sheets*, 2002.