



## HIV/AIDS AND OLDER ADULTS

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) can affect everyone and does not discriminate against gender, race and ethnicity, where one lives, and of course, age. The 50 and older group is the fastest growing population with HIV. In 2013, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported persons aged 50 and older accounted for approximately:

- 18% of new HIV diagnoses
- 26% of persons living with HIV
- 27% of all AIDS diagnoses
- 59% of all deaths of persons with AIDS

Of those individuals who were diagnosed with HIV at age 50 or older, 44% were 50-54 years of age.

There are many older adults who have HIV, but have not been diagnosed or aware of their HIV/AIDS status. This may be due to the following reasons:

- Health care providers do not always test older people for HIV/AIDS and may miss diagnosis during routine checkups.
- People who are 50 years or older may mistake signs of HIV/AIDS for the aches and pains of normal aging.
- They are less likely than younger people to get tested.
- Older adults know less about HIV/AIDS than younger people and may not know how it spreads or the importance of using condoms, not sharing needles, and getting tested for HIV.
- Older people are less likely than younger people to talk about their sex lives or drug use with their health care providers.
- Health care providers may not ask older patients about their sex lives or drug use or talk to them about risky behaviors.
- The stigma of HIV/AIDS may be more severe among older persons, leading them to avoid getting tested or hide their diagnosis from family and friends.

When someone is diagnosed with HIV, they often find themselves battling depression. Older adults living with HIV/AIDS need support and understanding from their healthcare providers, family and friends. When HIV is compounded with other diseases common to aging, like cardiac disease, osteoporosis, diabetes and frailty, the issue of depression becomes significant and must be addressed. Depressed individuals are unlikely to adhere to medical treatment or succeed in making necessary life-style adjustments, placing them at high risk for poor health outcomes.

Getting tested and connected with treatment for HIV helps reduce the spread of the disease by decreasing communicability by up to 96%. There are many types of testing and resources available in addition to testing offered by healthcare providers. Other options include contacting your local health department, community health organizations or health centers.

## WHAT IS HIV AND AIDS AND WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

- HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a virus that compromises the immune system.
- A person who is HIV-positive can develop an opportunistic infection, which can lead to the development of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).
- When the body becomes infected, initially, antibodies against HIV begin to form between 6-12 weeks.
- During the window period, flu-like symptoms can occur. Examples include fever, rash, muscle aches and swollen lymph nodes and glands as well as unexplained weight loss, bruising, and chronic diarrhea.
- Without treatment, HIV usually progresses to AIDS between 8-12 years after infection with HIV.
- With treatment, symptoms may not be present for 15 years or longer.

## RISK FACTORS FOR HIV TRANSMISSION

You may be at increased risk for infection if you have:

- Had unprotected sex with anyone who has any of the risk factors listed below.
- Been given a diagnosis of, or been treated for, hepatitis, tuberculosis (TB), or a sexually transmitted disease (STD) such as syphilis.
- Received a blood transfusion or clotting factor during 1978–1985.
- Injected drugs, legal or illicit, during which equipment (such as needles, syringes, cotton, water) and blood were shared with others.
- Had unprotected vaginal or anal sex (that is, sex without using condoms) with men who have sex with men, multiple partners, or anonymous partners.
- Exchanged sex for drugs or money.

## FACTS ABOUT HIV/AIDS

You may have read or heard things that are not true about how you get HIV/AIDS. Here are the FACTS:

- You cannot get HIV through casual contact such as shaking hands or hugging a person living with HIV/AIDS.
- You cannot get HIV from using a public telephone, drinking fountain, restroom, swimming pool, whirlpool or hot tub.
- You cannot get HIV from sharing a drink.
- You cannot get HIV from being coughed or sneezed upon by a person living with HIV/AIDS.
- You cannot get HIV from giving blood.
- You cannot get HIV from a mosquito bite.

## PROTECT YOURSELF, GET TESTED

**Locate HIV Testing Near You:** Send a text message with your ZIP code to KNOWIT (566948), visit [HIVtest.org](http://HIVtest.org) or <http://locator.aids.gov/>, OR contact 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) for assistance in locating a testing site.



THE AIDS INSTITUTE

National HIV/AIDS and Aging Awareness Day, September 18<sup>th</sup>, is sponsored by The AIDS Institute. The AIDS Institute is a national nonprofit and nonpartisan public policy, research, advocacy, and education organization with offices in Washington, DC and Tampa, Florida. Begun as a grass roots community mobilization effort in the late 1980s, The AIDS Institute's mission is to promote action for social change through public policy, research, advocacy, and education.

**For more information about HIV/AIDS and Older Adults or to become involved with The AIDS Institute's National HIV/AIDS and Aging Awareness Day Campaign (September 18<sup>th</sup>), Please contact [Aging@TheAIDSInstitute.org](mailto:Aging@TheAIDSInstitute.org) or visit [www.NHAAAD.org](http://www.NHAAAD.org) for additional resources.**

HIV/AIDS data is referenced from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [www.cdc.gov/hiv](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv).