



H I V

SOAIDS

> **HIV is a virus that weakens the human immune system (Human Immunodeficiency Virus). It is present in the blood, semen, vaginal fluid and breast milk of a person who has HIV. An HIV infection can be treated with antiretroviral drugs. These stop the virus multiplying in your body. The sooner you start treatment, the less damage the virus can do to your body.**

What will you notice if you have HIV?

One to six weeks after infection with HIV you may have the first symptoms. These are very similar to flu symptoms: tiredness, headaches, aches and pains, fever, sore throat, swollen glands and skin rashes. If you have these symptoms soon after you've had unsafe sex, tell your doctor immediately. He or she will refer you to a specialist clinic.

Most people who have become infected with HIV don't notice it for a long time. But as the infection develops, you may experience tiredness, weight loss, fever, night sweats, diarrhoea, shortness of breath or skin rashes. When your immune system has become very weak, you can develop all kinds of serious infections and rare forms of cancer. You then have AIDS. Fortunately AIDS is less and less common in the Netherlands as a result of the availability of HIV treatment.

Risk of HIV

- > **Unsafe sex.** Most people become infected with HIV during unsafe sex. Having anal sex is the greatest risk of infection. Oral sex (sucking and licking) only carries a slight risk. The risk of HIV is higher if the mucous membrane (lining of a part of the body) is damaged, perhaps by another STI. If you are a man who has had unsafe sex with another man, you should get tested for HIV and for other STIs too.
- > **Blood.** You can also get HIV from contact with infected blood. Taking drugs using infected needles, for example, or from a blood transfusion with infected blood. Blood transfusions are safe in the Netherlands. All blood donations are tested for HIV.

- > **From mother to child.** Mothers can pass on HIV to their babies. That's why all pregnant women in the Netherlands are tested for HIV. Drugs can prevent the baby also getting HIV.

PEP

If you have had unsafe sex with someone who is or could be HIV positive, you can get PEP treatment. It is also available if you have run any other risk of infection. PEP (Post Exposure Prophylaxis) is a course of treatment with antiretroviral drugs that will stop you becoming HIV positive. The treatment must be started as soon as possible, and definitely within 72 hours.

PEP is not available all over the Netherlands. Get in touch with your local GGD health service to find out where you can go. Is the GGD closed? Then call the accident and emergency unit of the nearest hospital. PEP is also available at sexual assault centres that you'll find at the Dutch website centrumseksueelgeweld.nl

Men who have sex with other men

In the Netherlands, HIV is found mainly in men who have sex with men. Are you a boy or man who has sex with men? Then get yourself tested regularly for HIV and other STIs. The Dutch website mantotman.nl gives advice about testing. You can also do a PEP-check on the site (in Dutch). This tells you whether you are eligible for PEP and where you can go for it in your area.

Treatment for HIV

The only way to properly suppress HIV is a combination of antiretroviral drugs. It is important that you take these drugs every day. You have to do that for the rest of your life. There are now combined pills consisting of different antiretrovirals that make the drug therapy easier. Starting treatment early has great advantages: you stay healthier and there is hardly any risk of you passing the HIV on to someone else.

- > So get yourself tested and, if necessary, treated in time.

People with HIV see their HIV specialist regularly. Antiretroviral drugs can have side effects. The newer drugs do have fewer side effects. But all patients react differently to the drugs. Discuss any side effects with your HIV specialist.

Warning partners

Tell your sexual partners that you have HIV. You should at least tell any partners you have had since your last HIV negative result. They can then be tested, even if they have no symptoms. This is not only important for their own health, but also to prevent further spread of HIV.

- > Is it difficult for you to warn partners yourself? Then ask your local GGD health centre to do it for you. They will be discreet. partnerwaarschuwing.nl is a Dutch website you can use to warn your partners.

For more information about prevention, testing and treatment of HIV, go to soaids.nl/en/hiv

AIDS STI helpline

Do you have a question about HIV that has not been answered in this leaflet?

- > **Call the AIDS STI helpline:** 0900 204 204 0 (10ct per min.)
Monday and Tuesday: 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.
Wednesday to Friday: 2.– 6 p.m.
- > **Send an email to the AIDS STI helpline:**
Sense@soaids.nl, you will receive an answer within two working days.
- > **Or visit the chat office hour on Soatest.nl**
Monday to Thursday: 1.30 – 3.30 p.m.

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