



## Older Adults and HIV/AIDS

Nearly 1.2 million people are living with HIV in the U.S., and one in five of those (20 percent) are unaware of their infections. The only way to know if you have HIV is to get tested.

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS, and it is affecting older Americans.

According to the most recent CDC data, people over the age of 50 accounted for:

- **17 percent** of new HIV diagnoses in 40 states with long-term confidential name-based reporting; and
- **31 percent** of persons living with an HIV diagnosis

Many people mistakenly assume that older Americans are not sexually active and therefore not at risk for HIV infection. This is not the case. A 2007 national survey of Americans ages 57 to 85 found that the majority of older Americans are sexually active. This is particularly true for healthy older Americans.

However, older Americans do not always realize that they may be at risk for HIV infection. Many came of age in the decades before AIDS and did not receive the information about HIV prevention that younger generations did. Others were married or in long-term relationships for

many years and tuned out information about HIV.

Now, after being widowed or divorced, they are entering intimate relationships again for the first time in decades.

Compared with those who are younger, they may be less knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS and therefore less likely to protect themselves.

While older Americans need information about HIV prevention, most do not talk to their doctors about their sex lives. Only about a third of older men and just a fifth of older women surveyed had discussed sex with a doctor since age 50. Doctors, too, may underestimate their older patients' risk for HIV/AIDS and this may miss opportunities to discuss HIV prevention or offer HIV testing.

Older people also may mistake the early symptoms of AIDS for the aches and pains of normal aging and neglect to get tested for HIV, or they may feel ashamed or afraid of being tested.

### **KNOW YOUR STATUS. GET TESTED FOR HIV.**

Knowing your HIV status is the first step toward preventing the spread of HIV- if you know you are infected, you can take steps to protect your partners. Also, if you are living with HIV, the sooner you find out, the sooner you can receive life-extending treatment. Because other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) can play a role in the acquisition of HIV, knowing whether you are infected with



an STD is critical for reducing your risk for HIV infection.

### WHAT IS THE HIV TEST?

The HIV test detects whether or not you have been exposed to the HIV virus. There are several different kinds of tests: blood tests, an oral (mouth) test, and the recently FDA-approved over-the-counter HIV test. The at home HIV test allows you to screen for HIV in the privacy of your own home, and is available online and at local drugstores.

HIV tests can take a few days to 2 weeks for results, or with rapid HIV tests you can get results in 20 to 30 minutes.

### WHERE CAN I GET TESTED?

To find an HIV testing site near you, visit:

<http://www.hivtest.org>.

Or, call: 1-800-CDC-INFO

(1-800-232-4636)

TTY: 1-888-232-6348

In English, en Español

### WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

You have the power to help stop the spread of HIV.

- **Be safe.** Even if you or your partners are past the age where you need to worry about unwanted pregnancy, you still need to protect yourself from HIV and other STDs. The best way to prevent HIV is to abstain from having sex. Being in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with an uninfected partner is one of the most reliable ways to prevent being infected with HIV. Reducing your number of sex partners can decrease your risk for HIV as well. If you do have anal, oral or vaginal sex, it is vital to use a latex

condom every time. Correct and consistent use of the male latex condom is highly effective in reducing HIV transmission.

Additionally, HIV can be spread by injecting drugs through needles and syringes if they are contaminated with the blood of someone who is HIV infected. It is critical that those who inject drugs use clean needles and syringes – and never share them.

- **Talk to your doctor.** Many older Americans visit the doctor on a routine basis, but they do not often bring up the subject of sex. But talking about HIV testing is your responsibility. Medicare now covers HIV screening once every 12 months for people who ask for the test. Do not assume your doctor will ask you to be tested for HIV.
- **Spread the word.** In 2009, more than 48,000 Americans were estimated to be newly infected with HIV. Set an example by getting tested and spreading the word that other older Americans should do the same.

For more information about HIV and AIDS, visit: <http://www.aids.gov> or <http://www.actagainstaids.org/>.

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