

Living Well with AIMGA

VOL. 12 - HIV/AIDS

Compiled by AIMGA's Health and Wellness Team

**HEALTHHUB FOR
NEWCOMERS**



Health Matters! Wellness Matters! Diversity Matters!

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DECEMBER: HIV/AIDS



Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a virus that attacks one's immune system. If left untreated, HIV can lead to **acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS)**. There is currently no effective cure. Once people get HIV, they have it for life. However, with appropriate and effective treatment and care that has been developed over the years, HIV has become a manageable chronic health condition, enabling people living with HIV to have long and healthy lives. In commemoration of World AIDS Day on December 1st, join AIMGA in learning more about AIDS/HIV awareness through reading Volume 12 of this Living Well with AIMGA newsletter. Together, people globally unite to show support for people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS and to remember those who lost their lives to HIV/AIDS. Educate yourself today!

Sources: [WHO, 2023](#); [Mayo Clinic, 2023](#); [United Nations, 2023](#)

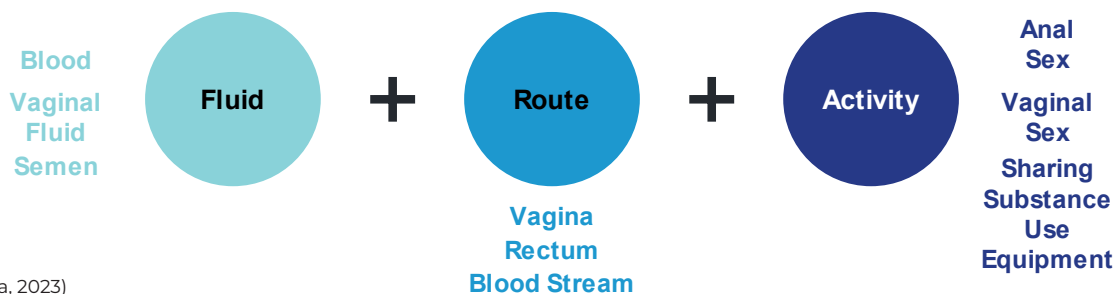
Getting Started: Tips & Resources



- **Videos:** [What is HIV / AIDS and how does it affect your body?](#); [HIV / AIDS Prevention: Know the biggest risk factors for transmission](#); [What to expect when beginning treatment for HIV/AIDS, explained by an expert](#); [Staying Positive About Being HIV Positive](#); [I am HIV-positive. So what?](#)
- **World AIDS Day:** recognized annually on December 1st to raise awareness, celebrate how far we've come in terms of HIV/AIDS diagnosis and treatment, and to continue advocating for a cure. In 2023, the theme is "[Let Communities Lead](#)".
- **International Society for Infectious Diseases -** resources on [recent publications](#)
- **Q&A:** [HIV/AIDS](#)

TRANSMISSION EQUATION:

The fragility of the HIV Virus means it requires a **special set of circumstances** to be able to pass from one person to another:



(Safelink Alberta, 2023)

HOT TOPIC:

AIDS Associated Cancers

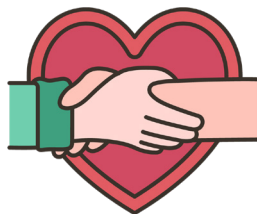


AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) is caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), a virus which destroys immune cells, leaving the body incapable of fighting infections. AIDS occurs when untreated HIV infection severely depletes the body immune cells which leaves the body susceptible to various types of infections and cancers. AIDS associated cancers may not be directly caused by HIV; damage to the immune system, continuous inflammation, increased risk of infection with other cancer-causing viruses (e.g. Human Papilloma Virus, HPV; Human Herpes Virus 8, HHV8; Epstein Barr Virus, EBV; Hepatitis B and C viruses) are some of the ways that HIV infection predisposes one to cancer.

The most common AIDS associated cancers include Kaposi sarcoma, lymphoma, lung, anal, cervical, and testicular. Kaposi sarcoma commonly affects the skin and mouth, causing purple to brown spots. Lymphomas affect the central nervous system and lymph nodes in the chest, neck, underarms and groin causing swollen lymph nodes, memory loss, seizures, headaches or stroke-like symptoms. Lung cancers can cause cough, bloody sputum, difficulty with breathing, weight loss. Advanced cervical cancer may cause abnormal vaginal bleeding and discharge.

Avoiding sharing of needles or syringes, avoiding unprotected sex and multiple sexual partners and regular HIV screening can help prevent HIV infection. For people living with HIV, smoking cessation, limiting sexual partners, using condoms, regular check-ups and strict adherence to antiretroviral medications can reduce the risk of developing AIDS associated cancers.

Sources: [Canadian Cancer Society](#); [American Cancer Society](#); [John Hopkins Medicine](#); [Medscape](#); [National Institute of Health](#); [World Health Organization](#)





HEALTH REMINDERS!



- To date HIV/AIDS has no cure, but if you have been diagnosed with HIV, it is crucial to take your antiretroviral medication as prescribed by your doctor. A good adherence to your treatment plan can help to control the virus's replication and improve your overall health.
- Living with HIV/AIDS can be challenging, so it is important to seek support from healthcare professionals, support groups, and/or mental health services. A strong Support system allows you to effectively deal with the psychological and emotional aspects of living with HIV/AIDS.
- Practice safe sex: proper and consistent use of condoms, notify your sexual partner and get tested together.
- Regular testing is also important, especially for those with high-risk behaviours and/or who are sexually active. Early detection provides the opportunity to have a good treatment plan and a longer, healthier life.
- Stay updated on the latest research and development on HIV prevention and treatment. This will give you the power to make informed decisions about your health.

Sources: [WHO, 2023](#); [CDC, 2022](#); [NIH, 2020](#); [Phillips, 2023](#)

DID YOU KNOW?



- HIV and AIDS are NOT the same thing. HIV is a virus and AIDS is a diagnosis.
- In Canada, the first case of AIDS was diagnosed in 1982. Statistics show that an estimated 62,790 people have HIV in Canada. An estimated 90% are diagnosed, 87% of those diagnosed are on treatment, and 95% of those on treatment have achieved viral suppression.
- 1/10 people living with HIV/AIDS in Canada are NOT aware of being HIV positive.
- Men who have sex with men are 131 times more likely to get HIV than other men.
- People born in countries where HIV is endemic are 6.4 times more likely to get HIV than other Canadians.
- People who inject substances are 59 times more likely to get HIV than those who do not.
- Indigenous Canadians are 2.7 times more likely to get HIV than other Canadians.
- Infection spreads more easily during the early stages of the virus, so if you have any of the symptoms listed above, it is important to get tested and treated right away if diagnosed.
- HIV-1 can be found throughout the world, but HIV-2 is almost exclusively found in West Africa. HIV-1 is transmitted more easily than HIV-2, and HIV-1 infection progresses more rapidly to AIDS.

Sources: [ACPHD, 2023](#); [SafeLink Alberta, 2023](#)

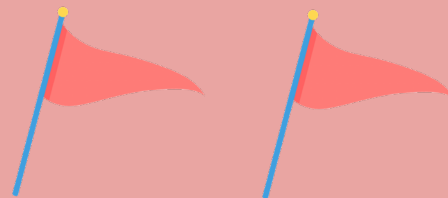
RED FLAGS

- 1 The symptoms of HIV and AIDS vary, depending on the phase of infection. If you experience the following [symptoms](#), please check in with your doctor to get tested: fever, headache, muscle aches and joint pain, rash, sore throat and painful mouth sores, swollen lymph glands on neck, diarrhea, weight loss, cough, night sweats. These are common signs of **Primary infection (Acute HIV)**, which can happen within 2-4 weeks after the virus enters the body and is characterized by a flu-like illness that can last up to a few weeks. During this 2-4 week highly infectious period, some tests may not be able to detect the virus, but you can still pass the virus to others, as your viral load is quite high at this time. Your health care provider may ask you to repeat the test if it's negative and there's a possibility you have HIV.
- 2 In the **Clinical latent infection (Chronic HIV)** phase, HIV is still present in the body and in white blood cells. However, many people may not have any symptoms or infections during this time. This stage can last for many years if you're receiving antiretroviral therapy (ART). Some people develop more severe disease much sooner.
- 3 In the **Symptomatic HIV infection phase**, the virus continues to multiply and destroy your immune cells, which are the cells in your body that help fight off germs.

You may develop mild infections or chronic signs and symptoms such as: fever, fatigue, swollen lymph nodes — often one of the first signs of HIV infection, diarrhea, weight loss, oral yeast infection, shingles, or pneumonia.

- 4 **Progression to AIDS** - Access to better antiviral treatments has dramatically decreased deaths from AIDS globally. Thanks to these life-saving treatments, most people with HIV today do not develop AIDS. Untreated, HIV typically turns into AIDS in about 8-10 years. When AIDS occurs, this means your immune system was severely damaged. You'll be more likely to develop diseases that wouldn't usually cause illness in a person with a healthy immune system. These are known as opportunistic infections or opportunistic cancers. Click [here](#) to learn more about the signs and symptoms of some of these infections or read the hot topic above to learn about these types of cancers.
- 5 If you think you may have been infected with HIV or you are at risk of contracting the virus, please contact your doctor to get tested and to seek more health advice.

Sources: [Mayo Clinic, 2022](#); [Healthline, 2014](#); [Vaillant & Gulick, 2022](#)



MYTH OR FACT?

Sources: [Cleveland Clinic, 2021](#); [Community Access Network 2021](#); [WebMD, 2022](#)

Click on each myth bubble to find out true, evidence-based information.

You can contract HIV by interacting with HIV-positive individuals.

HIV always leads to AIDS.

People with HIV cannot have children.

A couple does not need to protect themselves if they both have HIV.

Having HIV means your life is over and that it is a death sentence.



COMMUNITY RESOURCES & ORGANIZATIONS

- **SafeLink Alberta:** non-profit organization that has been serving and advocating for priority populations in Calgary and southern Alberta since 1983. Their mission is to reduce the risks associated with sexual activity and substance use through education, non-judgmental services, and harm reduction programming.
- **International AIDS Society (IAS):** is the world's largest association of HIV professionals, with members from more than 170 countries. IAS convenes, educates and advocates for a world in which HIV no longer presents a threat to public health and individual well-being. They encourage scientific response, build global solidarity and enhance human dignity for all those living with and affected by HIV.
- **The Global Fund:** created to fight the deadliest infectious diseases that were known to humans over twenty years ago - AIDS, tuberculosis (TB) and malaria.
- **UNAIDS:** leading the global effort to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Canadian Foundation for AIDS Research:** have funded over \$25 million across more than 550 research projects since 1987 to help end the HIV epidemic in Canada, with a focus on prevention, treatment, and care.
- **Canadian AIDS Society:** represents community-based HIV/AIDS organizations across the country. Their objective is to strengthen the response to HIV/AIDS in Canada and enrich the lives of people and communities living with, and affected by, HIV/AIDS.
- **ViiV Healthcare:** A positive life starts every day. Read more about HIV, living with HIV, treating HIV, and other resources through this organization.



IMG SPOTLIGHT



Sue Ny

Sue Ny is a medical doctor from Myanmar who has vast experience in managing patients with HIV/AIDS, including the use of Antiretroviral Therapies (ARTs) and the treatment of opportunistic infections. Sue worked as a medical officer at a specialized clinic that focused on the treatment of HIV. During her time there, she gained extensive experience in managing HIV patients from diverse cultural backgrounds and social statuses, including pregnant women and children. Throughout her work, she demonstrated empathy and compassion towards vulnerable patients alongside patient-centred care and shared decision-making.

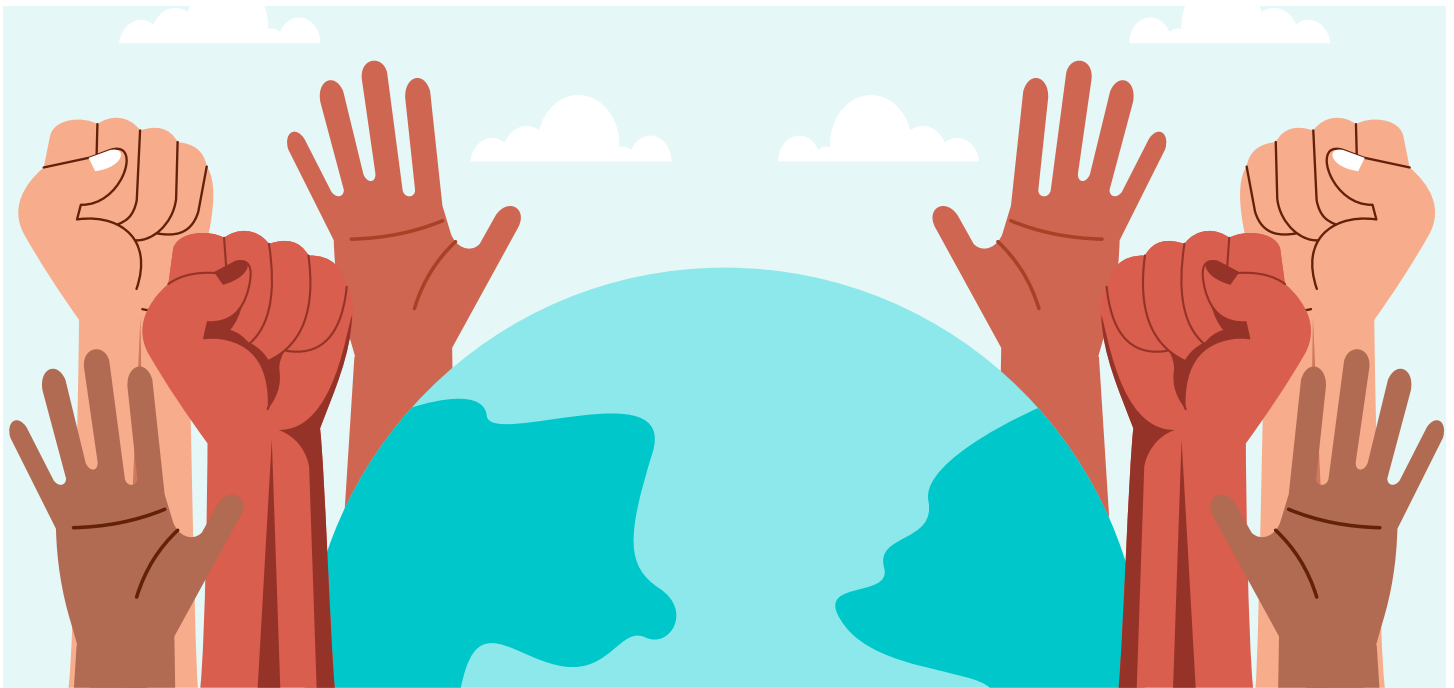
Skills gained from AIMGA:

“The skills I acquired from AIMGA are truly invaluable. I learned to communicate effectively with teenagers and prioritize patient-centred care, all while adapting to the unique approach of the Canadian healthcare system. I am confident that these skills will make me an asset to any healthcare team.”

Biggest Lesson Learned & Advice for Other IMGs:

“I understand that providing support and showing compassion towards patients living with HIV is of utmost importance. Our team once conducted research after discovering an outbreak of multidrug-resistant HIV cases in a specific area. We found that someone who is non-compliant with ARTs deliberately spread the virus amongst her community by making holes in condoms as a response to discrimination. It is crucial that we take steps to prevent discrimination against people living with HIV and promote inclusivity in our community. Failure to do so may lead to similar cases occurring in the future.”





HUMAN RIGHTS DAY (December 10th)

Purpose:

The purpose of celebrating Human Rights Day is to highlight human equality. It is a day dedicated to the emphasis of every human's fundamental right, irrespective of their race, gender, religion, colour, language, national origin, social strata, property, birth, status, political opinion or any other opinion.

Key Facts:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), a global pledge, was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10th, 1948.
- The [Alberta Human Rights Commission](#) has resources on many human rights topics. They include short information sheets, in-depth guides, videos, publications, promotional items, etc.

Additional Links:

- The Alberta Human Rights Act: [Video](#)
- Discrimination and the Law: [Playlist of videos](#)
- Click [here](#) to learn more about how you can take part in Human Rights Day.
- [United Nations](#) – Human Rights Day

A special thanks goes out to the following international medical graduates: Daniel Aigbovorhiuwa, Edom Teketel, Aisha Ashraf, Sue Nya, Marleen Polus, Lateefat Hammed Imam, and Oluwadamilola (Dami) for their additional contributions.



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