

# HIV/AIDS INFORMATION FOR VETERANS



## ABOUT HIV/AIDS

- HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is an incurable virus that invades the immune system and prevents the body from fighting off infections and diseases.
- If HIV is not treated, it will lead to AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome), the final stage of HIV infection.
- Not everyone who has HIV will progress to AIDS, but if you test positive for HIV, you must receive treatment for the rest of your life to suppress the virus.

## TAKE THE TEST

An HIV test is the only way to be certain about your HIV status.

- Approximately 1 in 8 people with HIV don't know they have it.
- A person with HIV could show no symptoms for years, but could still pass the virus on to others.
- Test results can help Veterans with HIV get treatment before they experience life-threatening symptoms and stop transmission to others.

VA has a goal to test every Veteran at least once for HIV. Contact your nearest VA health care facility and say 'yes' to the HIV test.

## STAYING HIV NEGATIVE

If you test negative for HIV, make sure you keep it that way.

- Always have protected oral, vaginal, or anal sex with a condom or other latex barrier.
- Don't share needles or other equipment to inject

drugs or to pierce the skin.

- If you're at increased risk, get tested frequently. You can also talk to your provider about PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis), a medication that keeps HIV negative people from becoming infected with HIV.

## LIVING WITH HIV

Advancements have been made in the treatment and care of HIV. You can live a long and healthy life after a positive diagnosis.

- **Get Care:** Treatment and counseling will help you stay as healthy as possible and prevent passing HIV on to others. Talk with your provider about antiretroviral therapy (ART), which helps prevent the HIV virus from spreading.
- **Stay in Care:** Treatment is a lifelong process. Research shows that continuous use of ART will lead to very low levels of HIV in your blood. While HIV is not curable, keeping your HIV in check will help you live healthier and longer and will greatly reduce your chances of passing the virus on to others.

## LEARN MORE

Want more information on HIV/AIDS?

Visit [www.hiv.va.gov](http://www.hiv.va.gov).

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