

## HIV/AIDS

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a virus that attacks cells that help the body fight infection, making a person more vulnerable to other infections and diseases. It is spread by contact with certain bodily fluids of a person with HIV, most commonly during unprotected sex (sex without a condom or HIV medicine to prevent or treat HIV), or through sharing injection drug equipment. If left untreated, HIV can lead to the disease AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). The human body can't get rid of HIV and no effective HIV cure exists. So, once you have HIV, you have it for life. It was first identified in 1981 and is the cause of one of humanity's deadliest and most persistent epidemics. There have been scientific breakthroughs where HIV medicine such as Antiretroviral therapy (ART), Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) and Post-exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) that help people with HIV live long and healthy lives, prevent transmitting HIV to their sexual partners and to prevent folks from getting HIV through sex or drug use.

Since reports of HIV began to emerge in the United States in the 1980s, the HIV epidemic has frequently been linked to gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (MSM) by epidemiologists and medical professionals. The first official report on the virus was published by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) on June 5, 1981, and detailed the cases of five young gay men who were hospitalized with serious infections. A month later, The New York Times reported that 41 homosexuals had been diagnosed with Kaposi's Sarcoma, and eight had died less than 24 months after the diagnosis was made. By 1982, the condition was referred to in the medical community as Gay-related Immune Deficiency (GRID), "gay cancer," and "gay compromise syndrome." It was not until July 1982 that the term Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) was suggested to replace GRID, and even then it was not until September that the CDC first used the AIDS acronym in an official report. Although the name was only temporary, the stigma that it caused the gay community still has ripple effects today in the way gay men interact with people, the way that people who have HIV interact with people and the way that society treats men who have sex with men.

The only way to know for sure if you have HIV is to get tested. Testing is relatively simple. There was a huge surge in LGBTQ individuals to get tested annually or after every new partner to help stop the spread of the disease in the community. These testing measures are still popular today and has become more popular outside of the LGBTQ community with anyone who is partaking in sexual encounters. You can ask your health care provider for an HIV test. Many medical clinics, substance abuse programs, community health centers, and hospitals offer them too. In Edmonton, we have our very own HIV clinic called HIV Edmonton that has testing, resources, and programs!