

# HIV/AIDS and ABORIGINAL PEOPLE



## ***Our voices have Power!***

*Our voice can create **hope** and **healing** ...*

*Our voice can help **end HIV infections** ...*

*Our voice can **stop HIV/AIDS stigma** and **discrimination** ...*

*Our voice can **reduce the fear** of being **tested** for **HIV** ...*

## ***Be a part of the solution!***

**Begin by learning about HIV/AIDS and how it continues to affect Aboriginal people living in Canada. Learn about the behaviours that increase the risk of HIV infection and how to reduce these risks. Learn about the importance of testing for HIV (and other sexually transmitted infections). Become an HIV/AIDS champion in your community by speaking to others.**

**To find out what your voice can do, contact the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS network or any of its members.**

Visit: [www.caan.ca](http://www.caan.ca)

Call toll free:

**1 888 285-2226**



## **ABOUT HIV and AIDS**

HIV or Human Immunodeficiency Virus - is a virus that attacks our body's immune system. Over time and if not treated, HIV will leave your body open to serious infections and cancers. When this happens the disease is known as AIDS or Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome. And this can happen in a very short time or take more than 10 years.

Early diagnosis of HIV infection and beginning appropriate treatments can keep you healthy and prevent or delay the onset of AIDS. By finding out if you are HIV positive can give you an opportunity to learn how to protect others from becoming infected.

**There is no cure for AIDS and no vaccine against HIV infection.**

## **TREATING HIV and PREVENTING AIDS**

Treatments now available for HIV and for AIDS-related infections and cancers have greatly improved and are helping prolong the lives and improve the quality of life for hundreds of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people living with these diseases.

You are encouraged to consult a doctor or health representative as soon as possible after learning about your HIV status to ensure you have access to the appropriate treatments available - including highly active antiretroviral treatments (HAART). This very powerful combination of three or more antiretroviral medications work together to slow down HIV production in the body and keep you healthy.

## **HOW HIV/AIDS AFFECTS ABORIGINAL PEOPLE <sup>1</sup>**

Aboriginal persons continue to be over-represented in the HIV epidemic in Canada.

We represent slightly more than three percent of the total Canadian population and yet, we represent almost ten percent of the total number of people living with HIV in Canada. Every day, one more Aboriginal person will find out that they have tested positive for HIV: the overall infection rate among Aboriginal persons was about three times higher than among non-Aboriginal persons. This is evidence that the determinants of health as well as cultural, social, economic and environmental factors contribute to increasing the risk of HIV infection, and this is especially true among Aboriginal populations.

Aboriginal people living in Canada represent over 16% of people living with AIDS - and this is a direct result of inadequate or delayed access to testing,

<sup>1</sup> Canada Communicable Disease Report (1 August 2006, Volume 32, Number 15), Public Health Agency of Canada

HIV/AIDS and ABORIGINAL PEOPLE (CONTINUED)



support, diagnosis and care, coupled with the stigma associated with seeking these services. Aboriginal People living with HIV/AIDS (APHAs) are from all ages, all walks of life and from everywhere in our society. APHAs have complex needs as HIV/AIDS affects people's emotional and physical health, quality of life, finances, independence and self-esteem.

Of the Aboriginal people infected with HIV in 2005, 53% were probably exposed to the virus as a result of injection drug use (IDU), 33% from unprotected sex between a man and woman, 10% from unprotected sex between men, and 3% from men who have sex with men and inject drugs.

The proportion of new HIV infections in 2005 due to IDU among Aboriginal Canadians (53%) is much higher than among all Canadians (14%). This highlights the uniqueness of the HIV epidemic among Aboriginal persons and underscores the complexity of Canada's HIV epidemic.

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# PROTECTING YOURSELF FROM INFECTION



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## **WHAT BEHAVIOURS PUT US AT RISK FOR HIV INFECTION?**

It's what you do – not who you are – that puts you at risk of getting infected with HIV.

These behaviours increase the risk of HIV infection:

- Having unprotected sex – anal, vaginal or oral.
- Sexual abuse, forced sex or sex without lubrication can increase the possibility of tears in the vagina or anus – providing an entryway for the HIV virus.
- Use of non-injection drug use or alcohol – when under the influence we are more likely to make unsafe decisions.
- Sharing sex toys without using a condom.
- Sharing needles and other equipment used for injecting drugs or snorting drugs.
- Sharing tattooing, piercing and acupuncture equipment.
- Being exposed to HIV in a health care setting.

## **HOW DO I REDUCE THE RISK OF HIV INFECTION?**

To reduce your risk of contracting HIV:

- Always carry latex or polyurethane condoms with you, especially if you will be drinking or doing drugs.
- Use a condom every time when engaging in vaginal, anal or oral sex.
- Talk about safer sex with your partner before you get into bed (and don't leave it up to your partner to raise the topic!).
- Make sure to use lubrication, which can reduce the risk of infection by reducing tearing during intercourse.
- Never share needles or other drug use equipment.
- If you are getting a tattoo, body piercing or acupuncture, ensure that the equipment being used is sterile.
- If you work in an environment where you may come into contact with someone else's blood or with needles always take precautions.

## PROTECTING YOURSELF FROM INFECTION (CONTINUED)



- Ensure that you are not infected with other sexually transmitted infections they can increase your risk to HIV infection.
- Get tested if you think you have been exposed to HIV.
- If you are pregnant and concerned about HIV, talk with your doctor about being tested. Early treatment with medication can prevent the transmission of HIV from you to your unborn child.

The only way to be 100 percent safe against HIV infection is to not engage in sexual or other activities where HIV infection is possible.

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# GETTING TESTED FOR HIV

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## **SHOULD YOU GET TESTED?**

You should consider getting tested for HIV infection if you or your partner(s) have ever:

- Had sex without using a latex or polyurethane condom or other protective barriers.
- Had sex while under the influence of alcohol or drugs (you might not have used protection).
- Tested positive for other sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections like syphilis, gonorrhoea, chlamydia, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, etc.
- Shared needles, syringes or other drug use equipment.
- Had a tattoo, piercing or acupuncture with un-sterilized equipment.
- Had a blood transfusion or received other blood products before November 1986.

## **WHY SHOULD I BE TESTED?**

If your HIV test results are 'negative':

- You will have less stress and anxiety.
- You can learn more about how you can reduce your risk of HIV infection in the future.

If your HIV test results are 'positive':

- You can get appropriate medical and social care that can help you avoid HIV/AIDS-related illnesses and maintain a healthy, active lifestyle.
- You can take precautions to avoid transmitting HIV to others.
- If you are pregnant, you can reduce the chances of your baby getting HIV.

## **HOW DO I GET TESTED?**

- HIV testing is available through physicians, at clinics and in hospitals.
- Some sites offer anonymous testing for HIV, which means that no one other than yourself has access to your test results.

## **HOW DOES THE TEST WORK?**

First, be sure you speak to a nurse, doctor or counselor you trust before and after taking the test. Pre-test counselling is also an opportunity to receive accurate information about HIV and to talk about the effects of the test result, particularly if it is positive. Remember that it is your choice to get tested, and you must give your consent in writing.

## GETTING TESTED FOR HIV (CONTINUED)



If you agree to get tested, a small sample of blood is taken from your arm and sent to a lab. If your test results are negative, it means you do not have HIV infection – *it does not mean that you are immune to HIV infection!*

If your test results are positive, it means that you have been infected with HIV. You may be advised to inform your sexual or drug-using partners. You should also find out as soon as possible how to access treatment and counselling services.

HIV-positive pregnant women are also at risk of passing HIV on to their babies. Treatments are available to HIV-positive pregnant women to help reduce the risk of passing the virus onto your baby. Consult your doctor or health care professional for more information.

People who consider testing for HIV should also test for other sexually transmitted infections.

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## AFTER THE TEST

For people living with HIV infection, post-test counselling should be ongoing. It can help you:

- Cope with the psychological, social and economic consequences of HIV infection.
- Learn how to improve your health and well-being.
- Learn how to prevent further infections for yourself and others.
- Arrange to notify partners with whom you have had unprotected sex or shared needles that you are infected with HIV and encourage them to be tested.
- Decide if and to whom to disclose your HIV status – your family, friends, employer, etc.
- Empower you to take control of your own health and improve your quality of life.
- Improve family and community relationships.
- Keep up-to-date on new developments in the management of HIV infection.
- Find a support group for people with HIV infection.
- If you are a woman, understand the risks associated with pregnancy.
- If you are pregnant, reduce the risk of transmitting HIV to your baby.

## FINDING A TESTING CENTRE

To learn more about your HIV testing options, or to locate a testing centre in or near your community (including anonymous test sites or for information about rapid testing), call your **provincial/territorial HIV/AIDS hotline** or contact the **Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network** or any of its member organizations.



# GETTING TESTED FOR HIV (CONTINUED)



Contact the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network, your Community Health Centre or Nursing Station.

Visit: [www.caan.ca](http://www.caan.ca)

Call toll free:

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LOCATION	REGIONAL HOTLINES	MEMBER ORGANIZATION
<b>National:</b>		Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network 1-888-285-2226 <a href="http://www.caan.ca">www.caan.ca</a>
<b>Alberta:</b>	1-800-772-2437	Kimamow Atoskanow Foundation 1-866-971-7233 Or 1-866-971-(SAFE)
<b>British Columbia:</b>	N/A	Healing Our Spirit BC Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Society 1-866-745-8884 <a href="http://www.healingourspirit.org">www.healingourspirit.org</a>
<b>Eastern Arctic:</b>	1-800-661-0795	N/A
<b>Labrador:</b>	1-800-563-1575	Labrador HIV/AIDS Project 1-800-806-9980 <a href="http://www.labradorfriendshipcentre.ca/hlp.htm">www.labradorfriendshipcentre.ca/hlp.htm</a>
<b>Manitoba:</b>	1-800-782-2437	N/A
<b>New Brunswick:</b>	1-800-561-4009	Healing Our Nations Atlantic First Nations AIDS Network 1-800-565-4255 <a href="http://www.hon93.ca">www.hon93.ca</a>
<b>Newfoundland:</b>	1-800-563-1575	Healing Our Nations Atlantic First Nations AIDS Network 1-800-565-4255 <a href="http://www.hon93.ca">www.hon93.ca</a>
<b>Northwest Territories:</b>	1-800-661-0844	N/A
<b>Nova Scotia:</b>	1-800-566-2437	Healing Our Nations Atlantic First Nations AIDS Network 1-800-565-4255 <a href="http://www.hon93.ca">www.hon93.ca</a>
<b>Nunavut:</b>	1-800-661-0795	Canadian Inuit HIV/AIDS Network Pauktuutit Inuit Womens' Association 1-800-667-0749 <a href="http://www.pauktuutit.ca">www.pauktuutit.ca</a>
<b>Ontario:</b>	English 1-800-668-2437 French 1-800-267-7432	Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy 1-800-743-8851 <a href="http://www.oahas.org">www.oahas.org</a>
<b>Prince Edward Island:</b>	1-800-314-2437	Healing Our Nations Atlantic First Nations AIDS Network 1-800-565-4255 <a href="http://www.hon93.ca">www.hon93.ca</a>
<b>Quebec:</b>	N/A	First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission 418-842-1540 <a href="http://www.cssspnql.com">www.cssspnql.com</a>
<b>Saskatchewan:</b>	1-800-667-6876	All Nations Hope AIDS Network 1-877-210-7623 <a href="http://www.allnationshope.ca">www.allnationshope.ca</a>
<b>Yukon:</b>	1-800-661-0408 x8323	BloodTies Four Directions Centre 1-877-333-2437 <a href="http://www.bloodties.ca">www.bloodties.ca</a>

