

Woman and AIDS

*New
directions
and strategies*

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Presentation

Due to its specific nature and repercussions on women, it is worth giving particular attention to HIV infection in women. The first edition of this document was produced for this reason, to provide the female population with the necessary information to deal with the possibility of infection and its consequences.

However, the document needed to be updated. For this reason, this edition aims not only to continue on from the previous one but also to add to its content with the concepts of vulnerability – as a factor which results in greater exposure to HIV infection in women – and empowerment – as the best tool for prevention available to women in order to avoid infection. It also aims to reflect the fact that women live and experience sexuality differently depending on the stage they are at.

This publication has been produced by female experts who work or specialise in, or who belong to, different areas relating to women, and who have contributed with their knowledge and expertise.

We are sure that this second edition will successfully provide new guidance and strategies to help women face their own situation, both as regards prevention and with regard to sexual and emotional matters, and will also increase the amount of information on HIV/AIDS.

Albert Giménez Masat

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Why This Publication?

Due to the heterosexual transmission of HIV, women now account for over one quarter of all new infections diagnosed, and people are already talking about the “feminisation” of AIDS. Due to biological reasons, women are more vulnerable to HIV infection. On the one hand, they are more likely than men to contract HIV from unprotected sex because vaginal mucous is more fragile and semen has a greater infection capacity than vaginal fluids; on the other, they also suffer asymptotically from other sexually transmitted diseases which facilitate the transmission of HIV.

HIV/AIDS infection is also associated with inequality and gender violence: directly through sexual violence, and indirectly by reason of women’s possible inability to protect themselves and negotiate the use of condoms or the conditions under which they wish to engage in sexual relations.

However, HIV prevention must not be limited to talking about **safe sex**, the use of condoms and high-risk practices; we must also talk about **inequality, infringement of rights, sexuality and emotions**, among other things. This involves attaining the rights to information, education and healthcare and protection, which are part of sexual and reproductive rights.

Empowering women is an essential **prevention tool** now available to us to avoid HIV/AIDS. Preventing infection among women must involve individual and group education, in order to give us greater power in the making of decisions in every area and, in particular, in the emotional and sexual areas.

The 20th century saw a gradual increase in women’s presence in the public arena, access to formal education, independence and birth control; and women’s wish to have their own life projects has become more widely expressed, in spite of clear differences between countries.

In spite of this new scenario, the path that women must follow is not devoid of violence, discrimination, stigma and subordination, which are currently also present in relation to HIV/AIDS.

With this publication we aim to approach these topics and encourage all women once again. With regard to health, we want to help make differences between men and women more visible, since only in this way will we be able to tackle the right to health and the right to HIV/AIDS prevention from the point of view of gender.

We believe in women's creative and transformative potential to overcome many of the adverse situations in which we often find ourselves. We have to foster change in our society, help implement such change and banish attitudes which are contrary to our fundamental human rights, in order to be able to contribute to a society based on social justice.



1

Information on HIV Infection and AIDS

1.1. Basic Concepts

What is the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)?

HIV is the abbreviation for the full name 'human immunodeficiency virus'. This virus acts on the immune system, reducing the body's defences, and may cause acquired immune deficiency syndrome or AIDS.

What is AIDS?

AIDS is the most serious form of HIV infection.

A: ACQUIRED Caused by the transmission of the virus and not hereditary.

I: IMMUNE This relates to the immune system, which is in charge of producing white blood cells or lymphocytes, which are essential for fighting infections.

D: DEFICIENCY Lack, absence

S: SYNDROME A group of signs, symptoms and indications that characterise an illness.

Where can HIV be found?

HIV can be found in the blood and in most of an infected person's bodily fluids, although not all of them can transmit the infection.

The infection **cannot** be transmitted by fluids such as tears, saliva, sweat or urine.

However, it **can** be transmitted by blood, semen, vaginal secretions and breast milk.

This is why we talk about three infection transmission routes: **sexual contact, blood** and **perinatal** transmission.

1.2. The Transmission of the Infection and its Evolution

How is HIV transmitted?

By sexual contact

It is transmitted from person to person through sexual practices involving unprotected penetration. The virus enters the body through the mucous membranes in the mouth, vagina, penis and anus.

The risk varies depending on the specific sexual practice. **A single unprotected sexual encounter is sufficient to transmit HIV.**

Anal or vaginal penetration involving ejaculation without a condom entails a high risk of transmission due to the fragility of the vaginal and anal mucous membranes, because semen has a high infectious capacity.

In oral practices, the risk of transmitting the infection is lower, although it is increased when there are lesions in the mouth or genitals.

Exchanging sex toys (vibrators, dildos, etc.) can entail a risk of transmission of HIV if the objects being shared have been in contact with blood or vaginal fluids or have been used for sexual practices involving vaginal or anal penetration.

Other sexual practices such as kisses, mutual masturbation, caressing or rubbing carry no risk of infection.

Suffering from a sexually transmitted infection (STI) can also increase the probability of HIV infection, especially in the case of ulcerous STIs, which cause lesions to the skin or mucous membranes.

Sexual practices may entail a higher or lower risk of contracting the infection:

+

HIGH RISK

- PUNPROTECTED ANAL PENETRATION
- UNPROTECTED VAGINAL PENETRATION
The risk is higher during menstruation
- FELLATIO INVOLVING SWALLOWING OF SEMEN
- ORAL CONTACT (WITH THE PENIS, VAGINAL AND/OR ANAL) WITHOUT A BARRIER METHOD.
- SHARING SEX TOYS
- FELLATIO WITHOUT SWALLOWING OF SEMEN

-

LOW RISK

- If there is ejaculation, the risk of contracting the infection is increased.
- Some practices – such as kissing, intimate caresses or masturbation – don't carry any risk.

Blood (transfusion of infected blood)

Sharing syringes, needles or other equipment which has been contaminated with infected blood, used for tattoos or piercings or, in the case of healthcare workers, accidental puncture at work, all entail a high risk of HIV infection.

At present, transfusions of blood or blood products (such as plasma or platelets) and organ transplants are very strictly regulated and carry no risk of infection.

It is worth remembering that you **must not** share objects such as razors or toothbrushes, since they could be contaminated with infected blood and, therefore, entail a risk of transmission.

Vertical or perinatal infection

HIV can be transmitted through pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding.

The risk of transmission is present throughout pregnancy and childbirth, although the risk does not often materialise when the woman is receiving antiretroviral treatment. It is worth bearing in mind that a baby can also acquire the infection through breast milk; infected mothers are therefore discouraged from breastfeeding.

When the baby of an HIV mother is born, he or she will have HIV antibodies. However, this does not necessarily mean that the baby is infected. Whether or not the baby is infected will be determined by monitoring with tests during the next few months.



How is HIV not transmitted?

Social intercourse such as relations at work, school or public places (restaurants, toilets, swimming pools, public transport, etc.) does **not** entail a risk of infection.

Living with an infected person does **not** entail a risk of infection.

Barber shops, hairdressers and beauty salons must take hygiene measures, sterilising their cutting tools or using disposable equipment. It must be ensured that these steps are being taken.

How does HIV infection evolve?

The infection begins when the HIV virus enters the blood. The virus enters the body and starts to affect the immune system, which become gradually weaker. The duration of this stage is variable. Due to the fragile nature of the immune system, the infected person can succumb to certain illnesses which confirm that his or her defences have been seriously compromised and which indicate that AIDS has developed.

During the evolution of the infection, even if there are no symptoms, it is possible to infect another person at any time. This infectiousness is higher at particular times, for example when the person is initially infected.

Once the infection has been detected by means of HIV testing, antiretroviral treatment may begin and, if appropriate, the infection can start to be controlled. **Early detection** is important; this makes it possible to slow down the development of the infection as early as possible and improve the patient's health and quality of life.

HIV reinfection

People with HIV can be reinfected with other strains of HIV, which will contribute to the development of AIDS. It is therefore very important to remember the importance of taking prevention steps in order to avoid reinfection.



1.3. Preventing Infection

1.3.1. Preventing Transmission

Preventing sexual transmission

Preventing transmission in sexual practices is possible and easy. Reducing the risk is in your hands. Using a condom (male and female), **always** properly and from the start of the sexual encounter, is an effective prevention method. It is particularly important in the following circumstances:

- If you do not know if you or your partner may be infected.
- If you suspect that or don't know your usual partner may be engaging in sexual behaviour with other people.
- If you have occasional partners.
- If you or your partner, or both of you, are HIV-positive.

In order to reduce the risk of HIV infection in sexual activities:

- Use the male or female condom in sexual encounters involving penetration.
- Use a male condom for fellatio.
- Use a latex or plastic barrier method for cunnilingus or annilingus.
- If you are not using a condom, avoid ejaculation inside the anus, vagina or mouth.
- Do not swallow semen or leave it in your mouth.
- If you share sex toys, put a condom on them.
- Bear in mind that lubricants must be water-based (oil-based lubricants are not recommended because they deteriorate the material of which condoms are made).



Male condom



Female condom

Preventing transmission by blood

The sharing of sharp or cutting personal or household objects which may be in contact with blood is not recommended.

If you use injectable drugs:

- Use a new needle and syringe for each injection. You must always carry a new syringe with you. Never share injection equipment.
- Instead of injecting, you can smoke, inhale or snort, taking into account that the equipment (metal cylinder, bank notes, etc.) used for snorting can result in lesions which would facilitate blood contact and, therefore, the risk of infection if shared.

Preventing perinatal transmission

It is very important that all women wishing to get pregnant know if they are HIV positive.

In Catalonia, the first pregnancy-related medical appointment includes a mandatory blood test to detect infection (HIV test), which must be repeated in the second and third trimesters if there have been behaviours involving a risk of infection during that time. Nevertheless, it would be advisable for the woman's partner to undergo HIV testing at this time too.

HIV-positive pregnant women are guaranteed specialist healthcare during pregnancy and childbirth in a hospital environment. Depending on each case, the most appropriate treatment for the mother and the newborn will be decided in order to avoid the risk of transmission to the extent possible. This risk is currently under 1%.

In cases in which the woman did not know she was infected and no treatment was therefore given, the possibility of transmission to the baby was between 15% and 30%.

Transmission during breastfeeding is estimated at around 10%; for this reason, breastfeeding in such cases is not recommended, and formula-feeding is publicly funded.

1.3.2. *Methods for Avoiding Sexual Transmission of HIV*

The Male Condom

The male condom is currently the best known and most widely used type of condom. It is usually made of latex and must have official approval.

The box and individual wrapper must bear the European Union Conformity (EC) Mark as well as the expiry date and production batch number.

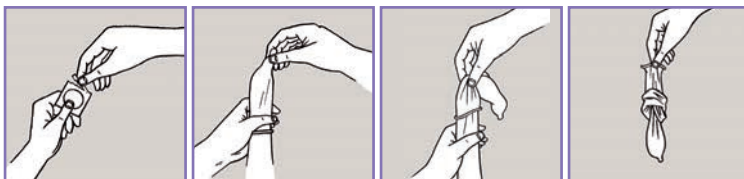
It includes a vessel for semen in order to ensure that ejaculation does not result in a risk of rupture.

Male condoms can be purchased at vending machines in public places, supermarkets, petrol stations, chemists, some NGOs and sex shops, among other places.

They must be stored in a cool, dry place, since heat can damage latex. When you carry them on you, you should put them in a small box in order to prevent damage or rupture.

Recommendations for the proper use of male condoms

1. The wrapper must be opened using your fingers, never with your teeth, taking care not to tear it with your nails or rings.
2. You must put it on when the penis is erect and before any attempt at penetration, leaving some room at the end and holding it with two fingers to ensure there is no air inside the vessel. The condom must cover the whole penis all the way to the base.
3. The penis must be withdrawn from the vagina before the erection is lost. In order to prevent the condom from being left inside, you must hold it at the base.
4. You must check that it has not ruptured, knot it, and throw it away in the bin, never in the toilet.
5. You must use a new condom every time you engage in vaginal, oral or anal sexual practices.
6. To prevent the condom from rupturing, you must follow the instructions for use and refrain from using oil-based lubricants (such as vaseline, body lotion, bath oil, etc.). Appropriate lubricants can be found in chemists and sex shops.



The Female Condom

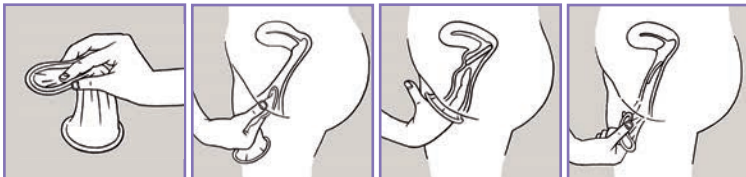
The female condom is made out of polyurethane and is as safe and durable as its male counterpart. The female condom is inserted into the vagina in a similar manner to a tampon without applicator, and covers the entrance to the vagina until the end.

Female condoms contain a large amount of lubricant, both inside and outside, facilitating both insertion and intercourse. The female condom is particularly recommended where it is difficult to negotiate the use of a male condom, since it can be inserted prior to the beginning of the sexual encounter.

Female condoms are sold in chemists.

Recommendations for the proper use of female condoms:

1. Hold the lower part of the inner ring, as shown in the picture.
2. Insert the ring in the vagina, pushing it as far inside as possible.
3. Insert your finger in the sheath until you are touching the end of the inner ring, and push it towards the inside of the vagina.
4. To take it out, twist the outer ring to ensure no semen is spilled and gently pull it out. Put it back in the package and throw it away in the bin.
5. You must use a new condom for each new sexual encounter.



Other ways of preventing HIV infection

There is currently no vaccine for the prevention of HIV, although research is being conducted in this area.

It is worth remembering that sexual relations do not necessarily have to involve intercourse. Pleasure can be obtained from caresses, mutual masturbation and sex toys, likewise leading to orgasm. You need a bit of imagination and to be willing to try it.

For oral sex, there are other methods such as the rubber dam, household plastic, etc. They are all conceived to prevent the vaginal fluid from coming into contact with any wounds which your sexual partner may have in the mouth.

Rubber dams, also known as dental dams, can be purchased in chemists. You can make your own by opening a condom along the middle or, more easily, using a piece of household plastic of any size you like.


In any case, always carry a condom with you if you think you may engage in sexual relations.

1.3.3. HIV Post-exposure Prophylaxis

This is an antiretroviral-based **exceptional emergency treatment** which may reduce the likelihood of contracting the HIV virus following exposure to the risk.

If you have been exposed to HIV and, therefore, there is a high risk of infection, you must go to the emergency department of certain hospitals, within the first six hours and no later than after 72 hours, to receive, following a medical assessment, the prevention treatment known as *HIV post-exposure prophylaxis*.

To find out which hospital to go to, call one of the following numbers:

<p>Confidential AIDS line</p> <p>SIDA 900 212222 Informació confidencial i gratuïta</p>	<p>Sanitat Respon (healthcare line)</p> <p> Sanitat Respon 24 hores 061</p>
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1.4. Detection of Infection

Early diagnosis is very important in order to enable the infection to be managed from the outset, for the evolution and adaptation of treatments, and for preventing transmission.

In order to find out if you are infected, you must undergo a specific HIV-antivirus test. **A negative result is reliable if three months have elapsed since the most recent potential exposure.** A person can then be said not to be infected (only in specific circumstances to be assessed by the doctor may repeat testing at six months be recommended). If the result is positive, a confirmation test, such as the so-called Western Blot, must be conducted in order to be able to give a definitive diagnosis of HIV infection.

There is currently a fast HIV test which has the advantage of providing results in around fifteen minutes. It must also be carried out after three months following the most recent potential exposure and, if it is positive, the result must be confirmed. You can find out where you can undergo these tests by calling the Sanitat Respon number.

If the result was positive, you are entitled to good advice regarding your new situation and how to handle it. Remember that the infection can be treated and, subject to a few changes (regular medical examinations, avoiding potential reinfection exposure, refraining from self-medicating, watching what you eat, etc.), you will be able to continue with your life as normal. It is also important that you find out how you may have been infected and that you tell the people with whom you have had unprotected sexual relations or shared drug consumption equipment that they too need to be tested for HIV.

1.5. Other Sexually Transmitted Infections

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are a group of infections whose common characteristic is that they are all transmitted from one person to another during sexual relations.

In addition to HIV, some of the most serious ones include hepatitis B, syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia.

A diagnosis of any of these infections is an indicator of practices involving potential exposure to infections and, therefore, to the risk of contracting HIV as well. This is why they are given special attention in this publication.



1.5.1. How Are They Transmitted?

Just like with HIV, they are transmitted mainly during sexual intercourse (with vaginal, anal or orogenital/anal penetration); however, in the case of other STIs, they can sometimes also be transmitted by sexual contact without penetration.

One can talk of the following forms of transmission:

- In sexual practices, transmission may occur through the exchange of the infected person's bodily fluids such as semen, vaginal and urethral secretions or blood. This is the case of HIV, hepatitis B, gonorrhoea and genital infection by chlamydia.

In the case of other STIs, genital herpes, genital warts and syphilis, transmission is through direct contact with the parts of the skin or

mucous membranes affected by the infection (in some cases there are visible lesions).

- In the case of some STIs, hepatitis B and hepatitis C, transmission can also occur through blood transfusions, as with HIV.
- Some infections, such as HIV and syphilis, can be transmitted to a baby during pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding.

You should know that:

- Most STIs can be contracted more than once.
- STIs are transmitted in series; i.e. the affected person can infect many other people who may in turn cause many new infections.

1.5.2. How Does HIV Infection Interact With Other STIs?

In HIV-negative people, suffering from an STI:

- Increases the risk of contracting HIV, since the mucous membranes can become swollen and eroded, making it much easier for the virus to get in.
- Is usually an indicator of unprotected sexual practices.

In HIV-positive people:

- It increases the risk of contracting an STI.
- Suffering from an STI increases the risk of HIV reinfection. Also there is the added risk of this being a new HIV strain which is either more virulent or more resistant to treatment, which would complicate the control of the HIV infection and speed up its progress.
- If you suffer from an STI, you are more likely to transmit HIV to your sexual partner.
- The clinical manifestation of an STI may be more acute and long-lasting.

1.5.3. Preventing STIs

Prevention is the best way to avoid STIs. You should know that:

The steps for prevention are the same as for HIV. The use of a condom is very effective for most STIs.

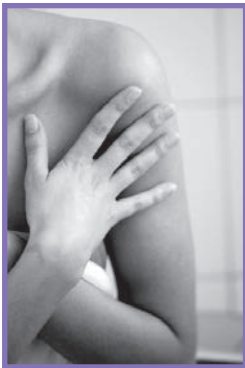
In the case of some STIs, there are currently vaccines of proven efficacy; these include: hepatitis A, hepatitis B and the human papillomavirus.

Since some STIs can go unnoticed – i.e. without any signs or symptoms – the only way to detect them is through specific laboratory tests. For this reason, if you have many occasional partners and/or you have had unprotected sexual relations, it is important that you inform the healthcare professionals treating you, so that they can assess whether any tests should be conducted.

When signs and symptoms appear, such as lesions in genital areas, abnormal vaginal secretions, a burning sensation when urinating, lower abdominal pain, pain during or after sex, etc., it is very important that you seek medical advice.

The infected person must receive treatment as soon as possible, and his or her sexual partners must also be informed so that they may be diagnosed and, if necessary, treated. This is the only way of preventing or reducing long-term health problems and breaking the chain of new infections.

Pregnant women are systematically offered syphilis and HIV testing, among others, during the first trimester of pregnancy.



2

Women, Sexuality and HIV/AIDS

2.1. Sexualities and Pleasure

Previously, women's sexuality was reduced to the reproduction aspect. This was reflected when they wanted to decide on the number of children they wished to have or use contraceptives and prevent sexually transmitted infections. In recent years, greater accessibility to modern contraceptive methods has enabled women to experience our sexuality and emotional relations more freely; in addition, the concept of a right to pleasure has become more widely accepted.

Nowadays, we women know that enjoying a healthy sexuality has two separate facets: pleasure and reproduction. It is now a matter of combining the two in order to enjoy sexuality freely and responsibly while claiming our right to pleasure.

Sexuality and its personal expression are influenced by a number of factors such as desire, the messages received, education and personal experiences, among others. Women can express their sexuality and experience pleasure in different ways. We must therefore talk not of a single sexuality but of a number of sexualities which vary depending on each woman, in spite of the existence of a heterosexual model which has become predominant. In addition, one's sexuality can be experienced both in a stable relationship and in casual relationships.

With regard to women's sexual lives, it is worth remembering that:

- They must be the result of a free personal decision.
- Clear communication increases the other person's trust and respect.

- Social stereotypes must not determine how we must give and experience pleasure.
- We must respect what we feel and what we want to express.
- We must be able to negotiate safer relations, both from a physical point of view and from an emotional one.
- Sexuality can be an enriching way of growing.

Sexuality must not be repressed, let alone nullified, by the fear of contracting HIV. Women must combine **the enjoyment of pleasure with the prevention of exposure to risk**. In this way women's sexuality will become a means of enrichment deriving from their freedom and responsibility.

Women must be aware of the possible risks entailed by our sexual practices, always bearing in mind what we want and what we don't want. If we expose ourselves to infection on a regular basis, we must reflect on why we are doing it. We can then ask for help to take better care of ourselves.



2.2. Vulnerabilities

The propagation and impact of HIV and other STIs in women are not random phenomena; they are related to our status of biological, social, cultural and financial vulnerability.

Biological Vulnerability

The risk of contracting HIV in unprotected heterosexual relations is two to four times higher for women than for men. This is due to the characteristics of their internal genitals (the tissue's higher sensitivity to wounds, frequent changes in the vaginal fluid, and the fact that they are the recipients of semen). Women are also more vulnerable to other sexually transmitted infections, which increase the risk of HIV transmission.

In teenage girls, the risk is higher due to the immaturity of the cervical mucous membrane and the lack of immunity to certain infections, which leaves them more unprotected. This is also the case during the menopause, because the vaginal mucous membrane is more fragile at this stage of life.

Social, financial and cultural vulnerability

Men's and women's sexual behaviours throughout their lives are determined by cultural, family and social patterns.

Inequalities between men and women generally lead to women's perception of sexuality being linked to stereotypes of femininity such as feeling wanted, having to be submissive and look after others, and therefore think more about protection and prevention for others rather than for themselves.

Beliefs relating to romantic love still exist, promoting gender inequality and placing women in a position of vulnerability in relation to HIV and other STIs.

In addition, women's financial power is often non-existent or much lower than that of men, which leads to a feeling of submission and even of loss of freedom.

We need to be aware of these vulnerabilities, since they can hinder the prevention of HIV and other STIs, as well as the exercise of our right to decide on the best possible way to protect ourselves from such infections.

There are specific care services for women. These can help minimise the effects of these vulnerabilities, overcome them and support us in this process. Useful telephone numbers and specific information can be found at the end of this publication.



2.3. Prevention Matters

2.3.1. Information, Attitudes and Abilities

All sexually active women are potentially exposed to contracting or transmitting HIV or other STIs unless they take appropriate prevention measures.

Putting such measures in place requires proper information and certain attitudes and abilities. You should know that:

- You must have proper information regarding the routes of transmission of HIV and other STIs.
- Having information on healthy sexual practices is essential for acquiring independence and self-confidence when deciding to indulge in such practices. Sometimes, we can find ourselves in unexpected situations.
- If you are in possession of clear and accurate information, you will be able to differentiate between those practices entailing actual risk and other situations not involving risk.
- Sexuality is practised in a variety of situations, some of which are planned and others unexpected. In both types of situation it may be difficult to talk to your partner, especially in relation to the prevention measures you can take.
- Emotional factors such as fear, insecurities, your own beliefs and lack of self-confidence, among others, can become an obstacle to making a decision regarding prevention measures.
- The consumption of alcohol and/or other drugs leads to reduced risk perception and awareness, making it more difficult to make decisions regarding the safest sexual practices.

If you have been exposed to HIV and other STIs, it is important that you seek professional advice. At the end of this guide you will find a list of entities and organisations which can provide you with information and advice.

Remember that prevention can result in more pleasurable sexual practices by making you more relaxed in relation to the lack of risk of infection with HIV and other STIs.

2.3.2. *Women Over 40*

Some women stop using protection when they reach the menopause or perimenopause, when the risk of pregnancy is reduced or disappears. They stop worrying about it and forget about the risk of STIs, including HIV.

During this time, women can also have certain misconceptions which hinder the taking of protection measures, such as “at my age, since I can’t get pregnant...”, “I have known him for a long time and he can’t infect me anything, can he?”, “I hadn’t been with anyone for such a long time”, or “he’s a good man with a good job...”

Remember that the risk of HIV and other STIs is not decreased by a woman’s age or the fact of growing older.



3

Living with the Infection

At present, although it is considered a serious disease, scientific advances relating to treatment have increased the quality of life of HIV-positive people and delayed the progress of the disease.

The set of treatments is known as antiretroviral therapy.

Finding out that you are HIV-positive is a very difficult thing to accept at the beginning, and you may need to let experts help you. They will make you see that, **from now on, your health depends above all on how you look after yourself.**

Matters to take into account:

- The evolution of the infection is not the same for everyone. You need to ask your doctor whether you need any treatment.
- You will need regular health checks to check your state of health and prevent the appearance of other diseases, as well as to receive preventive or therapeutic treatment.
- You must avoid reinfection with HIV and other STIs, since this would aggravate the evolution of the disease.
- You must always use a condom when having sexual relations. You have to protect yourself and others.
- It is important to find out how you were infected and inform the people with whom you have had unprotected sexual relations that they need to be tested for HIV.
- Look after your diet and personal hygiene. Avoid smoking, alcohol and other drugs. Get enough sleep and don't over-exert yourself physically.
- Don't self-medicate.
- With regard to pregnant HIV-positive women:

- Pregnant women with HIV who are not receiving any kind of treatment have a high risk (15%-30%) of transmitting the infection to their baby. This probability is much lower (1%-3%) if the woman undergoes monitoring and treatment during and after pregnancy and childbirth.
- If you are pregnant and are HIV-positive, you can choose to continue with your pregnancy or interrupt it.
- Knowing other HIV-positive people and sharing your experiences can have a positive effect. Being able to talk about it will reassure you.

In addition, HIV-positive people have a right to medical care, confidentiality, fair and appropriate treatment and non-discrimination. For this reason, talking about the infection also leads to a discussion on discrimination and stigmatising attitudes. These are often hardly noticeable and infringe human rights and women's rights in particular.

If you are discriminated against because you are HIV-positive, you can report it or contact the associations which provide legal assistance for cases of HIV/AIDS-related discrimination:

- Legal assistance for HIV/AIDS-related matters. HIV/AIDS and Human Rights Observatory. RedVIH (HIV Network).
- Catalan Women's Institute.
- AIDS Prevention and Healthcare Programme (Programa per a la Prevenció i l'Assistència de la Sida). Health Department. Generalitat de Catalunya.
- Free confidential AIDS helpline.
- Sanitat Respon (Healthcare line).
- Síndic de Greuges (the Catalan Ombudsman).

You will find the addresses and telephone numbers of the various entities and associations working against HIV/AIDS at the end of this publication.

Guaranteeing human rights and, in our case, the rights of women, involves the daily exercise of non-discriminating attitudes in every area (both in the public and private arenas) and both by the public and by the administrations.

4

Common Misconceptions

(**CM**: Common misconception / **R**: response)

CM1. Antiretroviral treatment eliminates the risk of HIV infection and it is no longer necessary to use a condom with one's partner.

R1. *Antiretroviral treatment does not exclude the risk of infection since, although it reduces the viral load and can even render it undetectable, the virus may not have fully disappeared.*

CM2. All lubricants are fine.

R2. *Water-based lubricants (water-soluble jelly such as glycerine) must be used, since greasy ones (such as butter, oil, suncream, vaseline, etc.) reduce the strength of latex and cause it to rupture more easily.*

CM3. I trust my partner, so I don't need to protect myself.

R3. *Love and trust won't protect you from HIV or other STIs. Using protection measures with your "stable" partner is not a sign that you don't trust them. Trust is based on being able to talk and make joint decisions.*

CM4. Cleaning your teeth before or after sex provides protection from HIV infection.

R4. *On the contrary; cleaning your teeth can erode or irritate the mouth's mucous membrane and facilitate the virus' entry into the body.*

CM5. Internal vaginal cleaning (douche or irrigation) will protect me from HIV infection.

R5. *No, it will not prevent the virus from entering the body or, therefore, the possibility of infection.*

CM6. I can catch HIV by kissing or sharing a plate or glass.

R6. *No, the infection cannot be contracted through saliva or non-sexual physical contact.*

CM7. A person with good social status who does sport and looks healthy... surely doesn't have HIV.

R7. *No. You cannot tell whether someone has HIV by their external appearance. There are no external signs for identifying people who are HIV-positive.*

CM8. HIV only affects homosexuals, sex workers, promiscuous people, young people and drug users.

R8. *HIV can affect any person who does not take steps to protect themselves, without any distinction as to gender, age, ethnic origin, sexual orientation or number of personal relationships.*

CM9. A woman with HIV cannot have healthy children.

R9. *Planned Caesarean sections and antiretroviral treatment for both the mother and the child have been proven to be very effective in reducing the risk of transmission. Thanks to this, the percentage of HIV transmission during pregnancy is less than 1%.*

CM10. I have unprotected sex without worrying because I get tested very often.

R10. *Getting tested for HIV will not prevent you from contracting the infection. It will not protect you from being infected. All the test does is detect whether or not you are infected.*

CM11. The best thing I can do to avoid infection is do nothing. Condoms aren't fully effective.

R11. *You can enjoy sex provided you take steps for prevention. When properly used, condoms provide full protection against HIV and some STIs.*

CM12. The withdrawal method, withdrawing the penis from the vagina before ejaculating (coitus interruptus), is a very effective way of preventing infections and pregnancy.

R12. *This is not a safe way of preventing HIV or other STIs or pregnancy. The safest and most effective method is to use a male or female condom.*

CM13. Sexual practices with a stable partner do not entail a risk of infection.

R13. *This is true unless the stable partner has exposed him or herself to potential infection by having unprotected sexual relations and has not got tested and had a negative result.*

CM14. The risk of HIV infection is the same for men and women.

R14. *Both men and women can be infected, but women are more vulnerable to infection due to biological, financial and social and cultural factors.*

CM15. Thanks to the available medication, nobody dies of AIDS anymore.

R15. *Although it is true that the current treatments have improved the quality of life of patients and delayed the onset of AIDS, this does not mean that everything's fine. HIV affects every aspect of a person's life. And it is still a serious incurable disease.*



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Main Points to Remember

- Although information is important, in order to effectively protect yourself from infection by HIV and other STI's, **you need to adopt responsible practices and attitudes.**
- Women are biologically more vulnerable than men to the risk of contracting an HIV infection.
- A single instance of unprotected sexual behaviour can be enough to contract HIV or other STIs.
- Remember that only you can decide how to engage in safe sexual practices, and that **you can say “no”** if the other person refuses to use prevention measures.
- HIV transmission routes are: blood, semen and vaginal secretions. In order for the infection to be transmitted, these infected fluids have to go into another person's blood through open wounds or mucous membranes (the inside of the anus, mouth, vagina and the glans penis).
- HIV cannot be transmitted in social relations such as those arising at the workplace, at school or in public places.
- **Always use prevention methods** (male and female condom, rubber dam) when engaging in sexual relations. These are the means of protection available to us, which reassure us and make us feel safe.
- If you are a drug user, never share your equipment.
- If you think you may have been infected, **it is very important to get tested for HIV antibodies.**
- If you want to get pregnant, it is very important that you get tested for HIV and other STIs.

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Useful Numbers and Specific Information

Anti-AIDS NGOs in Barcelona

Women's Area of the Department of Health and Sex Work (Àmbit Dona. Àrea de Treball Sexual i Salut).

Prevention Area (Àmbit Prevenció) (●)
Tel. No. +34 933 177 059
www.ambitprevencio.org

Catalan Anti-AIDS Citizen Association (Associació Ciutadana Anti-sida de Catalunya, ACASC) (●)
Tel. No. +34 933170505
+34 933171118
www.acasc.info

Catalonia and Balearic Islands Family Planning Association (Associació de Planificació Familiar de Catalunya i Balears)
Tel. No. +34 933 055 322
www.apf Cib.org

Contraception and Sexuality Centre for Young People (Centre Jove d'Anticoncepció i Sexualitat) (●)
[Specific care for young women]
Tel. No. +34 934 151 000
www.centrejove.org

Creació Positiva
Tel. No. +34 934 314 548
www.creacionpositiva.net

Genera Tel. No. +34 933 296 043
www.genera.org.es

Doctors of the World (Metges del Món)
Tel. No. +34 932 892 715
www.medicosdelmundo.org

wStop AIDS (Stop Sida)
[Specific care for lesbian women] (●)
Tel. No. 902 106 927
www.stopsida.org

Anti-ADS NGOs outside Barcelona

ACTUA Vallès (●)
Offices in Sabadell and Terrassa
Tel. No. +34 937 271 900
actua@actuavalles.org

AIDS Information and Advice Centre (CAIS). Tarragona Red Cross Provincial Group (●)
Tel. No. +34 977 244 769
www.cruzroja.es

ASSEXORA'TGN (●)
Tel. No. +34 665 640 435

Dr. Ferran Foundation
Tel. No. +34 977 519 100,
ext. 2277/2251
www.fundacioferran.org

Lleida Anti-AIDS Association (Associació Anti-Sida de Lleida) (●)
Tel. No. +34 973 261 111
www.antisidalleida.org

Girona Anti-AIDS Community Association (Associació Comunitària Antisida de Girona, ACAS) (●)
Tel. No. 972 219 282
www.acasgirona.org

This Association also has other offices in the area:

ACAS ALT EMPORDÀ. Figueres
Tel. No. +34 972 67 21 67

ACAS BAIX EMPORDÀ. Sant Feliu de Guíxols Tel. No. +34 972 32 40 05

General Information for Women

Catalan Women's Institute Information Centres (Oficines d'Informació de l'Institut Català de les Dones, ICD)
www.gencat.cat/icdona

- Barcelona
Tel. No. +34 934 951 600
- Tarragona
Tel. No. +34 977 241 304
- Girona
Tel. No. +34 972 975 874
- Lleida
Tel. No. +34 973 703 600
- Terres de l'Ebre
Tel. No. +34 977 441 234

Legal assistance for HIV/AIDS-related matters. HIV/AIDS and Human Rights Observatory. RedVIH (HIV Network)
 Tel. No. (+34) 934 584 960
contacta@redvih.org
www.redvih.org



Specific Information and/or Care on AIDS and other STIs

Public Healthcare Network's Sexual and Reproductive Health Assistance Programme (Programa d'Assistència a la Salut Sexual i Reproductiva (ASSIR) de la Xarxa Pública Sanitària)
http://www10.gencat.cat/catsalut/cat/servcat_primaria_assir.htm
 For more information about this resource, ask at your primary care clinic (CAP).

Centre for the Prevention and Control of Sexually Transmitted Infections (Centre de Prevenció i Control d'Infeccions de Transmissió Sexual)
Drassanes primary care clinic (CAP) (●)
 Tel. No. +34 934 412 997

Generalitat de Catalunya free confidential information helplines:

- AIDS Prevention and Assistance Programme of the Public Health Agency of Catalonia at the Ministry of Health (Programa per a la Prevenció i l'Assistència de la Sida de l'Agència de Salut Pública de Catalunya)
Tel. No. 900 212 222
- Sanitat Respon
Tel. No. 902 111 444

Young People. Catalan Health Institute (Institut Català de la Salut, ICS)
www.sexejoves.gencat.cat/ics_webjove/centres_PASSIR.html

Where to get tested for AIDS or HIV

(●) NGOs and centres offering HIV rapid test.

Further information at:

<http://canalsalut.gencat.cat>

Also at authorised chemists website
<http://www.farmaceuticonline.com/es/farmacias/servicios-adicionales/661>

SIDA
900 212222
Informació confidencial i gratuïta



<http://canalsalut.gencat.cat>