



## HIV/AIDS AND OLDER ADULTS

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) affects everyone and does not discriminate against gender, race and ethnicity, where one lives, and of course, age. The 50 and older population is the fastest growing population. In 2008, the 50 and over population comprised of more than 23% of the total United States population. By 2015, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that one-half of Americans with HIV will be age 50 and older.

In 2008-09, the CDC reported persons aged 50 and older accounted for approximately:

- 17% of new HIV/AIDS diagnoses
- 36% of persons living with AIDS
- 24% of all AIDS diagnoses
- 45% of all deaths of persons with AIDS

There are many older adults who have HIV, but have not been diagnosed or aware of their HIV/AIDS status. This may be due to the following reasons:

- Health care providers do not always test older people for HIV/AIDS and may miss diagnosis during routine checkups.
- People who are 50 years and older may mistake signs of HIV/AIDS for the aches and pains of normal aging.
- They are less likely than younger people to get tested.
- Older Americans know less about HIV/AIDS than younger people and may not know how it spreads or the importance of using condoms, not sharing needles, and getting tested for HIV.
- Older people are less likely than younger people to talk about their sex lives or drug use with their health care providers or anyone for that matter.
- Health care providers may not ask older patients about their sex lives or drug use or talk to them about risky behaviors.
- The stigma of HIV/AIDS may be more severe among older persons, leading them to avoid getting tested or hide their diagnosis from family and friends.

When someone knows he/she has HIV/AIDS, it is imperative to know and understand that there can be serious mental health issues associated, like depression. Depression may be a major problem for older people who may not have a strong network of friends or family who can help. People who are 50 and older may be coping with other diseases common to aging, like high blood pressure, diabetes, or heart disease. Older adults living with HIV/AIDS need support and understanding from their health care providers, family and friends.

In addition to getting educated about the transmission of HIV/AIDS, getting tested for HIV is another way to reduce the number of people infected with HIV. There are many ways that individuals can get tested. People can get tested for HIV from their healthcare provider. However, if someone does not have a healthcare provider, check your local listings for contact information to your health department, community organization or health center.

## WHAT IS HIV AND AIDS AND WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

- HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a virus that compromises the immune system.
- A person who is HIV-positive can develop an opportunistic infection, which then can develop into AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).
- When the body becomes infected, initially, antibodies against HIV begin to form between 6-12 weeks.
- During the window period, flu-like symptoms can occur. Examples include fever, rash, muscle aches and swollen lymph nodes and glands as well as unexplained weight loss, bruising, and chronic diarrhea.
- Without treatment, HIV usually progresses to AIDS between 8-12 years after infection with HIV.
- With treatment, symptoms may not be present for 15 years or longer.

## RISK FACTORS FOR HIV TRANSMISSION

You may be at increased risk for infection if you have:

- Injected drugs or steroids, during which equipment (such as needles, syringes, cotton, water) and blood were shared with others.
- Had unprotected vaginal or anal sex (that is, sex without using condoms) with men who have sex with men, multiple partners, or anonymous partners.
- Exchanged sex for drugs or money.
- Been given a diagnosis of, or been treated for, hepatitis, tuberculosis (TB), or a sexually transmitted disease (STD) such as syphilis.
- Received a blood transfusion or clotting factor during 1978–1985.
- Had unprotected sex with someone who has any of the risk factors listed above.

## FACTS ABOUT HIV/AIDS

You may have read or heard things that are not true about how you get HIV/AIDS. Here are the FACTS:

- You cannot get HIV through casual contact such as shaking hands or hugging a person living with HIV/AIDS.
- You cannot get HIV from using a public telephone, drinking fountain, restroom, swimming pool, whirlpool or hot tub.
- You cannot get HIV from sharing a drink.
- You cannot get HIV from being coughed or sneezed on by a person living with HIV/AIDS.
- You cannot get HIV from giving blood.
- You cannot get HIV from a mosquito bite.

## PROTECT YOURSELF, GET TESTED

**Locate HIV Testing Near You:** Send a text message with your ZIP code to KNOWIT (566948), visit [HIVtest.org](http://HIVtest.org) or <http://aids.gov/locator/>, OR contact 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) for assistance in locating a testing site.



THE AIDS INSTITUTE

National HIV/AIDS and Aging Awareness Day, September 18<sup>th</sup>, is sponsored by The AIDS Institute. The AIDS Institute is a national nonprofit and nonpartisan public policy research, advocacy, and education organization with offices in Washington, DC and Tampa, Florida. Begun as a grass roots community mobilization effort in the late 1980s, The AIDS Institute's mission is to promote action for social change through public policy research, advocacy, and education.

**For more information about HIV/AIDS and Older Adults or to become involved with The AIDS Institute's National HIV/AIDS and Aging Awareness Day Campaign (September 18<sup>th</sup>), Please contact [Aging@TheAIDSInstitute.org](mailto:Aging@TheAIDSInstitute.org) or visit [www.TheAIDSInstitute.org](http://www.TheAIDSInstitute.org) for additional resources.**

HIV/AIDS data is referenced from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [www.cdc.gov/hiv](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv).