

How do I find out if I've been infected?

There is a blood test for HIV, but it can't detect infection immediately. We recommend that you take an HIV test right away to make sure you weren't HIV positive before the assault. Many people are HIV-positive but don't know it. If you already have HIV, you will need a different treatment plan.

The first test to check if you have been infected through the assault can be done in about a month. It is recommended that you test several times in the next 6 months.

Referral Information

SA/DVTC contact information:

Referral Information

Ontario AIDS and Sexual Health Info Line

1-800-668-2437 (English + 15 other languages)

1-800-267-7432 (French)

This material is adapted from documentation developed for the Ontario HIV PEP Study (2003-2005), funded by the Ontario Women's Health Council. Revision of HIV PEP program materials has been funded by a Knowledge Transfer grant from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

The Ontario Network of Sexual Assault/ Domestic Violence Treatment Centres acknowledges the contributions of the Women's College Research Institute, the KTA project Advisory Committee, and each regional SA/DVTC that assisted in refining the HIV PEP program materials.



*Have you been
sexually assaulted?*

*Are you worried about
HIV?*

We can help.

**Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence
Treatment Centre**

Tel:



The risk of getting HIV from a sexual assault is relatively low. That doesn't mean it doesn't happen. If you have been assaulted, you probably feel anxious, scared, angry, or confused – all normal reactions. Concern about HIV may be part of these emotions.

You may be asking yourself the following questions:

⊞ **What are the chances that I have been exposed to HIV?**

⊞ **If I have been exposed, what can I do?**

⊞ **Who can I talk to?**

There are medications that may help to stop HIV transmission if you have been exposed and they are available free to anyone who has been sexually assaulted, seen at any of the Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Treatment Centres (SA/DVTC) in Ontario.

What is HIV?

HIV – Human Immunodeficiency Virus – is the virus that causes AIDS. A healthy body makes cells that fight infection. HIV attacks and damages those cells. When HIV has damaged these cells so badly that a person can't fight infection, the disease is called AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

A person infected with the virus is diagnosed as "HIV-positive", even if they don't have any symptoms.

What is the risk of getting HIV from an assault?

Overall the rates of HIV in Canada are very low (less than 0.5%), although they vary somewhat from place to place.

It is unlikely that you would know the assailant's HIV status. However, if the person who assaulted you was not a stranger, you may know things about them that can help estimate the risk.

Even if your assailant is HIV-positive, that does not automatically mean you will get HIV. The rates of HIV transmission through sexual contact are actually low.

There are many factors that affect your risk including the type of sexual contact, condom-use, sexually transmitted infections, bleeding or injuries, multiple assailants, etc.

A nurse from the Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Treatment Centre will help you to assess your risk so that you can make decisions about what to do.

Taking Medications to Prevent HIV Infection

HIV Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (HIV PEP) is the name for medications taken to reduce the risk of HIV infection.

Post = after

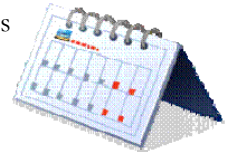
Exposure = coming into contact with HIV

Prophylaxis = a treatment to prevent infection



If I decide to take HIV PEP, how soon do I start?

HIV begins spreading as soon as it enters the body. **The earlier you start HIV PEP, the more likely it will work.**



HIV PEP must be started **within 72 hours (3 days)** of the assault and therefore SADVTCs will not offer it after this time.

You will need to take HIV PEP for **28 days**.

Are there side effects?

Yes. The most common are, nausea, tiredness, and diarrhea.. Severe side effects are rare.

How do I get started?

If you think you are interested in HIV PEP, you will be referred to the SA/DVTC in your area. The nurse or doctor there will ask some questions about your health. They will ask you:

If you are taking any medications (including prescriptions, over-the-counter, natural medicines and street drugs);

If you have an illness (or think you do);

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Based on your answers, the nurse or doctor can tell you if HIV PEP is safe for you. You can talk about your concerns, your HIV risk, and coping with any side effects. Together you can decide if HIV PEP is the right decision for you.