

# HIV: MESSAGES

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## About the Message Library

People affected by disaster must have access to timely, appropriate and accurate information to help them keep themselves and their families safe and well. They should know their rights, entitlements and be able to give feedback. Responders have a duty to put in place appropriate, systematic and coordinated mechanisms to ensure this.

Our Message Library offers clear, concise and simple messages on a range of topics as templates for you to adapt and use in the context you are working in. These are intended to help you make a quick start on communicating with communities while you further develop mechanisms for on-going dialogue with diverse groups within each community.

For help contextualising and using the messages we recommend you do our e-learning course and read the following technical guidance.

### E-learning

<https://kayaconnect.org/course/info.php?id=768>

### Guidance

<https://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-guidance/cdac-message-library-user-guidance>

## What is HIV?

HIV is a virus that damages the body's defence system, making it difficult to fight illnesses. If the virus and illnesses are not treated a person living with HIV may become very sick from other illnesses. If these illnesses are not treated they may then develop AIDS. A person who has HIV can pass it on to others even though he or she may appear healthy. There is no cure for people living with HIV but there are treatments that can reduce symptoms, prevent complications and help support a longer, healthier life.

## Who is most at risk?

Women, girls and boys are at higher risk of sexually transmitted infections and HIV during this [insert type of emergency here]. This is because social order breaks down, which can lead to increases in rape and other forms of sexual violence including survival sex work. If someone has been raped or been forced to have sex, the physical damage done can make the possibility of becoming infected or transmitting sexually transmitted infections and HIV much higher.

## How is HIV transmitted?

The HIV virus is mostly transmitted through unprotected sexual intercourse (that is sexual intercourse without a condom). It can also be spread through blood transfusions using contaminated blood, use of contaminated needles or from mother to child during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding when the mother is HIV positive.

## HIV prevention during sexual intercourse

Consistent and correct use of condoms is the only effective way of preventing HIV infection through sexual intercourse. Consistent use means using a condom correctly from start to finish each time someone has sexual intercourse, including every time a person has vaginal, oral or anal sex.

## Symptoms of HIV

Most people living with HIV do not know that they are HIV positive. This is because the symptoms are often not evident immediately after infection and in some cases can take a long time to develop. Some people do develop symptoms a few weeks or months after infection, such as fever, rashes, diarrhoea and joint pains.

## Treatment for HIV

If you have tested positive for HIV, your health worker can prescribe you drugs known as antiretrovirals or antiretroviral therapy. Antiretroviral therapy helps you manage living with HIV. It can slow down the spread of HIV in your body, which can help you to live a longer, healthier life. The health worker will be able to recommend when you should start taking antiretroviral drugs and what else you can do to help stay as healthy as possible.

## Advice for HIV positive pregnant women

If you are pregnant and HIV positive, seek advice and help from [insert info]. They can be contacted on [insert info]. They will be able to help you, advise you how to stay healthy and explain how to reduce the chances of HIV transmission to your baby.

## What to do if you are HIV positive and have a baby

If you are HIV positive, or are unsure about your HIV status, continue to breastfeed your child for six months from birth. If you give your baby only breastmilk and no other foods or liquids the risk of HIV transmission to your baby is very low. Exclusive breastfeeding gives your baby the best chance of surviving. Not breastfeeding is more dangerous to your baby than HIV. If your baby is exclusively fed using Breast Milk Substitute, then you will need to access supplies and contact your nearest health clinic to monitor the health and nutrition state of your baby (see earlier on using breastmilk substitutes).

## The importance of being tested for HIV

The only way to find out whether you have HIV is to have an HIV test. There are several reasons why it is important to get tested:

- Knowing your status allows you to make informed decisions regarding your future and your life. If you are HIV positive, it means you can start treatment in good time.
- Knowing your status allows you to prevent your partner from becoming HIV positive.
- Knowing your status also allows you to protect yourself against additional HIV infection and sexually transmitted infections.
- If infants and children with HIV are diagnosed early and receive the right treatment, they have a better chance to grow, learn, develop and have a future. Contact [insert info here] to find out where you/your child can get tested.

## Counselling support.

If you have tested positive for HIV, or your partner/member of your family has, you may want to talk to someone professional about what has happened to you. Counsellors can provide this service and help you come to terms with the illness. Please contact [insert info here] to find out about what services are available.

### Home based care if you are HIV positive

If you are HIV positive, encourage your partner and if you have children to get tested. If any test results are positive, they can then be given treatment to help them live with the condition. If you have sex, always use a condom consistently and correctly. Eat a variety of foods such as [add list of local foods available making sure it reflects a balanced and healthy diet] and drink plenty of fluids, such as clean water, because this will help you fight the disease. If you get sick, take plenty of rest and seek medical help

### Why a good diet is important for people with HIV

If a person living with HIV has access to a good diet, this will help to stop weight loss and keep their body healthy.

### Where to get antiretroviral therapy in the emergency

People living with HIV can get help and treatment at [insert info]. Opening times are from [insert time] to [insert time].

### REFERENCES

For more information on this topic, we recommend you read the following references.

World Health Organization (2022). **HIV/AIDS**  
[https://www.who.int/health-topics/hiv-aids#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/hiv-aids#tab=tab_1)

World Health Organization (2022). **HIV/AIDS: Factsheet**  
<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/hiv-aids>

### HELP US KEEP THE LIBRARY UP TO DATE

If you would like to contribute to topic reviews, have found a message that needs greater clarity, or wish to create a new topic, please contact us at [info@cdacnetwork.org](mailto:info@cdacnetwork.org).