



## HIV and AIDS: Dispelling the Myths

We have learned a lot about HIV and AIDS since we first heard about them in the early 1980s. Despite this, there are still a lot of myths and stigma surrounding the infection and disease. These false beliefs put people at greater risk for acquiring infection, and create discrimination against those living with HIV. It is important to understand the facts in order to reduce HIV transmission and help those who are affected by HIV and AIDS.

Some people still think HIV and AIDS are the same thing. HIV is the virus that causes AIDS, and AIDS is the disease.

One of the biggest myths is regarding HIV transmission. HIV is transmitted through these body fluids - blood, semen, vaginal fluid and breast milk. You cannot get it by hugging or kissing, through coughs and sneezes, or talking to or shaking hands with somebody with HIV. Touching a toilet seat, drinking from a water fountain, swimming in pools or sharing bed linen do not put you at risk. Some people throw away their eating utensils after sharing a meal with someone who is HIV positive – an unnecessary waste of cutlery! HIV cannot be passed by sharing forks, spoons, cups or food.

Others believe they cannot get HIV if they are using birth control such as the Pill, needle (Depo Provera) or spermicides. These

methods only prevent pregnancy, and do not protect against sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. Using condoms can reduce your risks of getting sexually transmitted infections and HIV, and getting pregnant.

Another misconception is that HIV is a death sentence. While there is no cure yet for HIV and AIDS, studies have shown that antiretroviral treatment can decrease the amount of virus in the body to undetectable levels, and it enables people to live normal, productive lives.

There is also a false belief that HIV and AIDS affect only gay men and drug users. In the early years following discovery, HIV and AIDS were mainly seen among men who had sex with men. We

now know that HIV and AIDS can affect anyone regardless of their sexual orientation, race, age, or socio-economic status.

You cannot tell whether you have HIV just through symptoms, neither can you tell your



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partner's status by their appearance. In the early stages of infection, many people experience flu-like symptoms for a few days to weeks, which usually disappear. This can be followed by years without any symptoms. People with HIV can look and feel healthy for up to ten years following their initial infection. The only way to know whether you, or your partner, have HIV is to get tested.

For more information, contact the Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority at 306-953-0670 or the Population Health Unit at 306-425-8512.

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*This HIV-AIDS Awareness-Action campaign is a collaboration of the Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority, The Population Health Unit, and The Northerner.*

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