

## Priority Area – HIV & AIDS

What is HIV? HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. With HIV, germs attack the body's natural ability to defend against sickness. If HIV is left untreated, the person develops Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome, or AIDS.

What is AIDS? AIDS is a set of [symptoms](#) (or syndrome as opposed to a virus) caused by HIV. A person is said to have AIDS when their immune system is too weak to fight infection, and they develop certain symptoms and illnesses. This is the last stage of HIV, when the infection is very advanced, and if left untreated will lead to death.

### Signs and Symptoms

HIV destroys white blood cells in the immune system called T-helper cells (or CD4 cells) and makes copies of itself inside these cells.

- Someone with HIV who isn't taking antiretroviral treatment will find it harder to fight off infections and diseases.
- It may take 10 or 15 years for the immune system to be so damaged that it can no longer defend itself, but the rate HIV progresses depends on age, general health and background.

### Prevention and Management

HIV can be prevented:

- Use a condom every time you have vaginal, anal or oral sex (if not taking PrEP when having sex with someone with HIV).
- Don't share injecting equipment.
- Take HIV treatment if you are a new or expectant mother living with HIV to not pass it to your baby during pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding.
- If undergoing blood transfusion or organ transplant, ensure supply is tested for HIV
- Healthcare workers, take precautions (wear gloves, goggles, wash, safe disposal)

There is no cure for HIV but with proper medical care and treatment, HIV can be controlled:

- Use PrEP – pre-exposure prophylaxis daily medicine
- If exposed, start post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) medicine in 72 hours for 4 weeks

Support and Resources:

- [HIV counseling, testing and referral clinics](#) by Florida county
- [HIV PrEP and nPEP providers](#) by area in Florida
- Florida Department of Health - [AIDS](#)
- [CDC - HIV Basics](#)
- National Institute of Health: National Institute of Allergy and [Infectious Disease](#)
- [About HIV-AIDS Avert.org](#)



Staff at the free HIV clinic, Colectivo Amigos Contra el SIDA ([CDC](#)).