

HIV/AIDS: The Basics

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. To understand what that means, let's break it down:

Human – This particular virus can only infect human beings.

Immunodeficiency – HIV weakens your immune system by destroying important cells that fight disease and infection. A “deficient” immune system can't protect you.

Virus – A virus can only reproduce itself by taking over a cell in the body of its host.

HIV Incidence (new infections):

The estimated incidence of HIV has remained stable overall in recent years, at about 50,000 new HIV infections per year. Within the overall estimates, however, some groups are affected more than others. MSM continue to bear the greatest burden of HIV infection, and among races/ethnicities, African Americans continue to be disproportionately affected.

HIV Diagnosis (new diagnoses, regardless of when infection occurred):

In 2011, an estimated 49,273 people were diagnosed with HIV infection in the United States. In that same year, an estimated 32,052 people were diagnosed with AIDS. Overall, an estimated 1,155,792 people in the United States have been diagnosed with AIDS.

Deaths:

An estimated 15,529 people with an AIDS diagnosis died in 2010, and approximately 636,000 people in the United States with an AIDS diagnosis have overall. The deaths of persons with an AIDS diagnosis can be due to any cause—that is, the death may or may not be related to AIDS.

HIV/AIDS Fast Facts

- More than 1.1 million people in the United States are living with HIV infection, and almost 1 in 6 (15.8%) are unaware of their infection
- Gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (MSM), particularly young black/African American MSM, have the highest rates of HIV and the poorest outcomes.
- By race, blacks/African Americans face the highest rates of HIV and the lowest engagement in HIV treatment

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HIV Testing

The most common HIV test is the antibody screening test (immunoassay). An immunoassay tests for the antibodies that the body makes against HIV. This test may be conducted in a lab or as a rapid test at the testing site. Approved in 2010, the **Fourth Generation** test detects HIV in the blood earlier than all previously recommended antibody tests. The Fourth Generation test does this by identifying the HIV-1 p24 antigen, a viral protein which appears in the blood sooner than antibodies. The window period for a fourth generation test is estimated to be from 11 days to one month after exposure to HIV infection. Conversely, the **rapid test** produces results in 30 minutes or less using blood or oral fluid. The window period for the rapid test is estimated to be three months after exposure to HIV infection. This is due in part to the rapid tests' use of oral fluid, which has lower antibody concentration than blood.

Behavior Change Is Determined By “Felt Understanding”

1. Perceived seriousness (or severity, consequences) of condition.
2. Perceived susceptibility to (or risk of) condition.
3. Knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about condition.
4. Perceived and actual social norms related to the behavior (influence of peers, family, cultural and religious norms).
5. Belief in one's ability to carry out a specific behavior.
6. Skills required for implementing the behavioral change.
7. Understanding of barriers and facilitators to intended change.
8. Perceived and actual cost (financial or personal).
9. Access to services or support.
10. Power dynamics within relationships, including distribution of power between partners.