

Seniors and HIV/AIDS

There are more than 1 million people in the United States living with HIV. One-fourth of them do not know that they are HIV-infected. The only way to know if you have HIV is to get tested.

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS, and it is affecting older Americans

In 2005, people over the age of 50 accounted for:

- **15 percent** of new HIV/AIDS diagnoses;
- **24 percent** of people living with HIV/AIDS; and
- **35 percent** of all deaths of people with AIDS

Many people mistakenly assume that older Americans are not sexually active and therefore not at risk for HIV infection. This is not the case. A 2007 national survey of Americans ages 57 to 85 found that the majority of older Americans are sexually active. This is particularly true for healthy older Americans.

However, older Americans do not always realize that they may be at risk for HIV infection. Many came of age in the decades before AIDS and did not receive the information about HIV prevention that younger generations did. Others were married or in long-term relationships for many years and tuned out information about HIV. Now, after being widowed or divorced, they are entering intimate relationships again for the first time in decades. Compare with those who are younger, they may be less knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS and therefore less likely to protect themselves.

While older Americans need information about HIV prevention, most do not talk to their doctors about their sex lives. Only about a third of older men and just a fifth of older women surveyed had discussed sex with a doctor since age 50. Doctors, too, may underestimate their older patients' risk for HIV/AIDS and this may miss opportunities to discuss HIV prevention or offer HIV testing.

Older people also may mistake the early symptoms of AIDS for the aches and pains of normal aging and neglect to get tested for HIV, or they may feel ashamed or afraid of being tested.

Know Your Status. Get Tested for HIV.

If you do not know if you are infected with HIV, you could be spreading it to others. If you are HIV - positive, you must take steps to prevent passing your HIV infection to another person. If you find out that you have HIV, it does not mean that you are going to get sick and die. While there is no cure for HIV, new drugs are available that can help you stay healthy.

What Is the HIV Test?

The HIV test detects whether or not you have been exposed to the HIV virus. There are several different kinds of tests: blood tests, urine tests, and an oral (mouth) test. Only a very small amount of blood is needed for the blood tests.

HIV tests can take a few days to 2 weeks for results, or with rapid HIV tests you can get results in 20 to 30 minutes.

Where Can I Get Tested?

Free and confidential or anonymous HIV tests are available. To find an HIV testing site near you, visit www.hivtest.org .

Or, call:

1-800-CDC-INFO

(1-800-232-4636)

TTY: 1-888-232-6348

In English, en Español

Open 24 hours a day - Confidential

What Else Can I Do?

You have the power to help stop the spread of HIV.

- **Be safe.** Even if you or your partner are past the age where you need to worry about unwanted pregnancy, you still need to protect yourself from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. The best way to prevent HIV is to abstain from having sex. If you do have sex, use a new latex condom every time. Do not share needles or syringes.
- **Talk to your doctor.** Many older Americans visit the doctor on a routine basis, but they do not often bring up the subject of sex or drug use. But talking about HIV testing is your responsibility. Do not assume your doctor will ask you to be tested for HIV.
- **Spread the word.** Thousands of Americans are infected with HIV each year. Set an example by getting tested and spreading the word that other older Americans should do the same.

For more information about HIV and AIDS, visit: www.aids.gov .

Fact sheet prepared by:

National HIV Testing Mobilization Campaign
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
06/08