



HIV/AIDS

Age-in-Action promotes a better understanding and awareness of HIV/AIDS, its causes, symptoms and prevention. Information and training is offered to equip older persons who are carers of loved ones infected with HIV/AIDS.

AIDS is a chronic, potentially life-threatening condition caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). By damaging the immune system, HIV interferes with the body's ability to fight the organisms that cause disease.

The symptoms of HIV and AIDS vary, depending on the phase of infection.

PRIMARY INFECTION: The majority of people infected by HIV develop a flu-like illness within a month or two after the virus enters the body. This illness, known as primary or acute HIV infection, may last for a few weeks.

Possible symptoms include:

Fever ➡ Sore muscles ➡ Rash ➡ Headache ➡ Sore throat ➡ Joint pain ➡ Mouth or genital ulcers ➡ Night sweats ➡ Swollen lymph glands, mainly on the neck ➡ Diarrhea

Although the symptoms of primary HIV infection may be mild enough to go unnoticed, the amount of virus in the blood stream (*viral load*) is particularly high at this time. As a result, HIV infection spreads more efficiently during primary infection than during the next stage of infection.

These early HIV symptoms usually disappear within a week to a month and are often mistaken for those of another viral infection. During this period, the carrier is very infectious. More persistent or severe symptoms of HIV infection may not appear for several years after the initial infection.

The symptoms that indicate an early HIV infection are extremely common. Often, you can't tell them apart from symptoms of another viral infection. Some people infected with HIV don't experience early symptoms. If you're concerned that you might have been exposed to HIV, talk to your doctor about your testing options.

WHERE CAN YOU GET TESTED FOR HIV?

Tests are free at most public health facilities.

WHAT HAPPENS BEFORE AND AFTER THE TEST IS DONE?

Counseling is done before and after the test irrespective of the results. At some facilities, two tests are done and results are ready within 20 minutes. With complicated cases, blood samples are sent to a laboratory. These tests are very accurate and results are ready within a few days.

It is important to go to a public health facility or private doctor with expertise in HIV/AIDS to have regular checkups. Viral load and CD4 counts should be checked at least twice a year.

Once infected with HIV, you might get an HIV- related opportunistic infection. Most HIV-related illnesses can be treated using proven medicines as prescribed by a medical doctor or medical staff at a public health facility.

HIV cannot be cured but it can be treated as a chronic, manageable disease. Antiretroviral medicines (given by a medical doctor/staff at a public health facility) help people with HIV to continue living normal lives. You only need to start taking antiretroviral treatment when a serious HIV-related illness is developed or when your CD4 count drops to below 350.

Antiretroviral treatment is available **free** at public health facilities.

**HIV/AIDS is a manageable chronic disease,
if you follow sound medical advice.**

RESOURCES

Age-in-Action	021 426 4249
AIDS Helpline	0800 012 322
HIV911	0860 448 911
Life Line	0861 322 322
TAC	021 422 1700