

## Dear All

In order to stem the HIV & AIDS epidemic the dramatic change in our awareness level regarding HIV & AIDS is required. We all have to take measures to stop HIV & AIDS gaining more ground, whether we are infected or not. Today we are sharing with you some guidelines and coping skills for prevention of HIV & AIDS.

# Guidelines for Prevention

## If you're HIV-negative

The following measures can help keep you from being infected with HIV:

- **Educate yourself and others.** Make sure you understand what HIV is and how the virus is transmitted. Just as important, teach your children about HIV.
- **Know the HIV status of any sexual partner.** Don't engage in unprotected sex unless you're absolutely certain your partner isn't infected with HIV.
- **Use a new latex or polyurethane condom every time you have sex.** If you don't know the HIV status of your partner, use a new latex condom every time you have anal or vaginal sex. If you're allergic to latex, use a plastic (polyurethane) condom. Avoid lambskin condoms — they do not protect you from HIV. If you don't have a male condom, use a female condom. Use only water-based lubricants, not petroleum jelly, cold cream or oils. Oil-based lubricants can weaken condoms and cause them to break. During oral sex use a condom, dental dam — a piece of medical-grade latex — or plastic wrap. Remember that although condoms can reduce your risk of contracting HIV, they don't eliminate the risk entirely. Condoms can break or develop small tears, and they may not always be used properly.
- **Consider male circumcision.** A large study in 2006 by the National Institutes of Health showed that medically performed circumcision significantly reduced a man's risk of acquiring HIV through heterosexual intercourse. The study, conducted in Kenya, showed a 53 percent reduction of HIV infection in circumcised HIV-negative men compared with uncircumcised men in the study. The outcome was heralded by the NIH as good news not only because it reduced the number of HIV-infected men, but also because it could lead to fewer infections among women in areas of the world where HIV is spread primarily through heterosexual intercourse.
- **Use a clean needle.** If you use a needle to inject drugs, make sure it's sterile, and don't share it. Take advantage of needle exchange programs in your community and consider seeking help for your drug use.
- **Be cautious about blood products in certain countries.** Although the blood supply is now well screened, this isn't always the case in other countries. If an emergency requires that you receive blood or blood products in another country, get tested for HIV as soon as you return home.
- **Get regular screening tests.** If you are a woman, have a yearly Pap test. Men and women who engage in anal sex should also have regular tests for anal cancer.
- **Don't become complacent.** Because potent antiretroviral medications have reduced the number of AIDS deaths, you may think that HIV infection is no longer a problem. But HIV & AIDS is still a terminal illness for which there is no vaccine and no cure. Right now, the only way to stay healthy is to protect yourself and others from infection.

## If you're HIV-positive

If you've received a diagnosis of HIV/AIDS, the following guidelines can help protect others:

- **Follow safe sex practices.** The only foolproof way to protect others from infection is to avoid practices that expose them to blood, semen or vaginal secretions. Barring that, carefully follow guidelines for safe sex, including using a new latex condom every time you have vaginal or anal sex and using a dental dam, condom or piece of plastic wrap during oral sex. If you use sexual devices, don't share them. It's also important to avoid having unprotected sex with other HIV-positive people because of the risk of acquiring or passing on a drug-resistant strain of the virus.
- **Tell your sexual partner(s) you have HIV.** It's important to tell anyone with whom you've had sex that you're HIV-positive. Your partners need to be tested and to receive medical care if they have the virus. They also need to know their HIV status so that they don't infect others.
- **If your partner is pregnant, tell her you have HIV.** Even if you're not the father, be sure to tell any pregnant woman with whom you've had sex that you're HIV-positive. She needs to receive treatment to protect her own health and that of her baby.
- **Tell others who need to know.** Although only you can decide whether to tell friends and family about your illness, you do need to inform your health care providers of your HIV status. This is not just to protect them, but also to ensure that you get the best possible medical care.
- **Don't share needles or syringes.** If you use intravenous drugs, never share your needles and syringes.
- **Don't donate blood or organs.** The virus will spread to other people.
- **Don't share razor blades or toothbrushes.** These items may carry traces of HIV-infected blood.
- **If you're pregnant, get medical care right away.** If you're HIV-positive, you may pass the infection to your baby. But if you receive treatment during pregnancy, you can cut your baby's risk by as much as two-thirds.

## Self-care

Although it's important to receive medical treatment for HIV&AIDS, it's also essential to take an active role in your own care. The following suggestions may help you stay healthy longer:

- **Make sure your doctor knows how to treat HIV.** Find someone who understands all the ramifications of the disease. You'll also want a doctor who is willing to work with you and who makes you feel comfortable and respected.
- **Follow your doctor's instructions.** Keep all of your appointments, and take your medications exactly as directed. Many treatment regimens are much simpler now than in the past — some requiring as few as one pill a day. Even so, sticking with treatment can be difficult. If you get sick from your medication, call your doctor. Don't stop taking your medication or change the dosage on your own.
- **Get immunizations.** These may prevent infections such as pneumonia and the flu.
- **Don't smoke or use illegal drugs.** These weaken your body even more.
- **Eat the healthiest diet you can.** Emphasize fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains and lean protein. Healthy foods help keep you strong, give you more energy and support your immune system. Unfortunately, you may not always feel like eating when you have HIV. But good nutrition is tremendously important. A registered dietitian can be especially helpful if you have diarrhea, weight loss or trouble eating. Also, because your nutritional needs are extremely high and you may not digest food well, talk to your doctor about vitamin and mineral supplements.
- **Avoid foods that may put you at risk of infection.** These include unpasteurized dairy products, raw eggs and raw seafood such as oysters, sushi or sashimi. Cook meat until it's well-done or until there's no trace of pink color.

- **Drink pure water.** The Department of Health and Human Services recommends that you boil tap water or use bottled or filtered water for drinking. If you buy a water filter, look for one that uses reverse osmosis as part of the purification process.
- **Get regular exercise.** Exercise helps increase your strength and energy levels and can help battle the depression that's often a part of dealing with HIV&AIDS.
- **Get enough sleep.** Rest when you need to.
- **Take care with companion animals.** Some animals may carry parasites that can cause infections in people who are HIV-positive. But that doesn't mean you should give up your companion animal. You can protect yourself by having someone else clean your cat's litter box or pick up after your dog. If you must do these chores yourself, wear latex gloves and wash your hands immediately afterward. Don't feed your pet's raw meat, and make sure they have all their shots. Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after petting or playing with your animals.
- **Find ways to relax.** This might mean anything from yoga or meditation to walking, reading, playing chess or computer games, or listening to music.
- **Keep your hands clean.** Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the restroom, before eating or preparing food, and after spending time in public places. You might find it helpful to carry an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with you for times when it's not convenient to use soap and water.

## **Coping skills**

Receiving a diagnosis of any life-threatening illness is devastating. But the emotional, social and financial consequences of HIV&AIDS can make coping with this illness especially difficult — not only for you but also for those closest to you.

Fortunately, a wide range of services and resources are available to people with HIV. Most HIV&AIDS clinics have social workers, counselors or nurses who can help you with problems directly or put you in touch with people who can. All have experience with HIV and are there to help you with the large part of your life that lies beyond medicine. They can arrange for transportation to and from doctor appointments, help with housing and child care, deal with employment and legal issues, and see you through financial emergencies.

Treatment for HIV presents its own problems. The regimens are sometimes complicated and side effects can be severe. Furthermore, the physical effects of treatment can create difficulties in other areas of your life. You may have a hard time explaining to your employer why you're sick so often or have so many doctor visits, for example. You also may not be able to participate in life as fully as you'd like.

Some of the following suggestions may help you deal with the emotional toll of living with HIV&AIDS:

- **Learn all you can about HIV/AIDS.** Find out how the disease progresses, your prognosis and your treatment options, including both experimental and standard treatments and their side effects. The more you know, the more active you can be in your own care.
- **Be proactive.** Although you may often feel tired and discouraged, don't let others — including your family or your doctor — make important decisions for you. It's vital that you take an active role in your treatment.
- **Maintain a strong support system.** Strong relationships are crucial in dealing with life-threatening illnesses. Although friends and family can be your best allies, in some cases they may have trouble dealing with your illness. If so, an HIV counselor, other people who are HIV-positive, or a formal support group may be especially helpful.
- **Take time to make important decisions.** One intense struggle you'll likely face is how much to reveal about your illness. When your disease is first diagnosed, you may not want anyone to know. But HIV&AIDS is a terrible burden to carry alone. Like many people, you may eventually decide that it's important for your emotional well-being to confide in someone you trust. The choice is up to you. You need to tell your current and former sexual

partners and your health care providers. Beyond that, there is no legal obligation for you to reveal your HIV status, even to your employer. In fact, the law guarantees your right to privacy.

- **Come to terms with your illness.** Coming to terms with your illness may be the hardest thing you've ever done. For some people, having a strong faith or a sense of something greater than themselves makes this process easier. Others seek counseling from someone who understands HIV&AIDS. Still others make a conscious decision to experience their lives as fully and intensely as they can or to help other people who have the disease. A vast support network is available for people with HIV infection.

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