

## **Frequently Asked Questions about HIV and AIDS**

### **Basic information about HIV / AIDS**

#### **1. What is AIDS?**

The word "AIDS" is an abbreviation of the English words that stand for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). It entails a group of symptoms and signs that occur at the late of infection with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) which compromises the human immune system to the extent where the HIV +ve person becomes vulnerable to diseases that the normal healthy body can overcome.

#### **2. What is HIV?**

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is the causing agent of AIDS. This virus enters the human body through infection from another human and may remain in the body for years (ten years or more) without any symptoms; however that person can still transmit infection to other people.

#### **3. Is there a cure for AIDS or a Vaccine?**

Scientists have not discovered yet any cure. But there are a group of medications anti-viral drugs that reduce that improve the patient's condition. These drugs (ARVs) are provided by the Ministry of Health in Egypt free of charge to patients. It is also necessary to treat opportunistic infections as they arise. There is still no vaccine to prevent HIV infection.

#### **4. Who is the Person Living with HIV (PLHIV)?**

A person living with HIV is a person who has been infected with HIV. This person may not necessarily have AIDS. The medical expression of AIDS should be only used to the person who proved clinically that the immune system collapsed to a certain point.

#### **5. How does HIV cause AIDS?**

In the first phase of exposure to HIV infection, the virus multiplies inside the body and affects certain immune system cells that help the body - in normal circumstances - to resist diseases. This period may extend from a few months to several years, during which a person living with HIV (HIV +ve person) may not be sick. Without these cells, the body cannot defend itself against various diseases, and so opportunistic infections may result.

#### **6. What are some misconceptions about AIDS in Egypt?**

Some believe that the main cause of transmission in Egypt is contaminated blood, but that is not true. Infection through sexual relations is the main reason for the infection. Likewise there is no risk in donating blood as the needles used in blood donations are always new and used once. Unprotected sex in the context of marriage is not risk-free if one partner is infected. Therefore condoms must be used for the protection of the couples.

#### **Website**

[www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org)

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## **Modes of Transmission / Prevention**

### **7. How does HIV infection occur?**

Virus may be transmitted from an infected person to another one **only** through:

- 1 - Unprotected (without a condom) sexual intercourse with someone who may be infected with the virus.
- 2 - Contaminated blood or sharing of injecting equipments.
- 3 - From a mother infected with HIV to her baby during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding.

### **8. What are the body fluids that may cause HIV infection?**

The only body fluids which may cause HIV infection HIV: blood and its products, sexual fluids (seminal and vaginal fluid), breast milk and amniotic fluid (surrounding the fetus inside the uterus).

### **9. Can HIV be transmitted through shaking hands or other casual means?**

No. HIV is not transmitted through casual day-day actions. HIV is not transmitted by touching, or kissing or hugging a person or through sharing bathroom, eating, or drinking or working with a person living with HIV. HIV is not transmitted by air, therefore, if an HIV+ve person coughs for example you catch a cold but it does not spread HIV.

### **10. How can HIV be prevented through sex?**

Abstaining from sex is the only way to guarantee that no infection will occur. However, the only effective way for HIV prevention through sexual intercourse is to use a condom properly and continuously from start to end. In case of not using a condom, you need to be sure that you have only one partner who is faithful and knows his/her HIV status. Knowing someone well does not mean that you are protected from infections.

### **11. Is there a difference between the vulnerability of men and women regarding HIV infection?**

Women are more vulnerable to HIV infection biologically and for social reasons. Worldwide, close to half of people living with HIV are females. Biologically: women are more vulnerable to infection, because the area of the vagina that could be exposed to infected sexual fluids is large; and women are more vulnerable to other sexually transmitted diseases which increase the chance of transmission of the virus. Socially: women's social status and economic dependence on men, and the high level of female illiteracy in Egypt, and the limited right to access to information on reproductive health are all factors that prevent women from discussing sexual matters with her husband, and therefore she cannot ask him to use condoms. In addition, in rural community especially girls marry at an early age, making them more vulnerable.

## **Testing for HIV (Voluntary and Confidential Counseling and Testing)**

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**12. How can I tell if a person is HIV+?**

You cannot tell if someone is infected with HIV from their appearance. HIV testing is the only way to confirm infection and monitor the person's medical condition.

**13. Why don't we just test everyone to discover the infected ones?**

Because the test only indicates the HIV status at the time of sampling. It does not guarantee that a person will not be infected at any other time. Testing must be accompanied by counseling. In addition there is a stage between the time the virus enter the body and the positive test results. Conducting the test at an early stage before the body produces the antibodies to the virus may show a false negative result. It is a must that the testing is voluntary in order to preventing further stigmatization and discrimination against those who have been exposed to infection and to encourage the groups most vulnerable to infection to progress to receive services without fear or coercion.

**14. Do I have to provide any personal information to get tested for HIV?**

No, because HIV testing is a strictly confidential and voluntary process. For this reason, VCT centers in most governorates will not ask for any identification or personal information.

**15. Where can I get more information?**

Call the toll free- hotline number 08007008000 for more information on HIV

**People Living with HIV**

**16. Should I report if I know someone is living with HIV?**

Should you report a person with diabetes, or high blood pressure or cancer? HIV is not a crime. It is an infection and should be treated like any other.

**17. Is it possible for a woman living with HIV to get pregnant?**

Infection with HIV does not interfere with pregnancy, but there is a possibility of viral transmission from mother to child during pregnancy or during labor or breast-feeding at about 20-40%. With medical follow up this risk can be reduced to 2%.

**18. Can the person living with HIV get married?**

Person living with HIV can lead a normal life provided the use of condoms (male – female) in every sexual contact from the beginning to the end. Partner's knowledge and consent to HIV status is a must. Providers from counseling center can advise partners on means of protection.

**19. Is it possible to integrate a person living with HIV in the community?**

Absolutely, PLHIV can live and work in the community without any danger to those around them.

**Human Rights and Rights of People Living with HIV**

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## **20. What are Human Rights?**

Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that are essential for a person to live a normal and healthy life and are essential for world peace and justice. Some basic rights include the right to life, freedom of movement and travel, personal safety, work, education, access to healthcare, and justice, among others.

## **21. What is discrimination?**

Discrimination is the act of treating a person in a way different from others that restricts his/her individual rights on the basis of nationality, skin color, religion, wealth, language, social status or other defining characteristic. It can also be on the basis of a person's health status, including their HIV+ status.

## **22. Does a Person Living with HIV have a right to privacy?**

Every human has the right to protection from invasion of privacy, including their right to keep their health status unrevealed. For this reason HIV testing is done on a voluntary basis and results kept strictly confidential.

## **23. Who defines human rights and who is responsible for them?**

Human rights are defined through international conventions and declarations that are signed and ratified by all member states of the United Nations. In addition these rights are also defined in most country constitutions, including that of Egypt. Countries are responsible for upholding these rights for their citizens and residents alike. Individuals are also responsible for fighting for their rights and for respecting the rights of others.

## **24. Is it necessary to restrict the rights of People Living with HIV for the safety of the public?**

At times it is necessary to restrict the rights of individuals who suffer from certain contagious illnesses for the health safety of the public. However this is NOT applicable for HIV as it is not contagious or transmitted in a way that presents a threat to the public.

## **25. What is the relationship between human rights and prevention of HIV?**

Many people avoid interaction with People Living with HIV due to the stigma and discrimination towards them, which in turn causes PLHIV to be unable to exercise their rights. This injustice doesn't only affect People Living with HIV however; it also makes people unwilling to be tested for HIV or use prevention services or obtain knowledge or change risky behaviors which make them more at risk of infection.

## **26. What is the link between the right to health, HIV and AIDS?**

Every individual has the right to access affordable quality health services. Included in this is the right to voluntary counseling and testing for HIV and reproductive health services. PLHIV have the right to these services as well as needed treatment services for HIV.

## **27. Do People Living with HIV have the right to freedom of movement?**

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Every individual has the right to move and migrate freely, including PLHIV. Therefore confining PLHIV or placing restrictions on their travel or residency into / from a country is an infringement upon this right.

**28. What is the right to information about HIV and AIDS?**

Every individual has the right to access correct information about HIV and the modes of transmission and prevention and risk-reduction methods as this helps them to protect themselves. In addition, it is every person's right to access information about sexual and reproductive health.

**29. Does a Person Living with HIV have the right to work?**

Yes. HIV is not contagious or easily spread and thus PLHIV have the right to obtain work. In addition, employers do not have the right to dismiss a person Living with HIV on the basis of their HIV status and they also do not have the right to request a person to be tested for HIV as a prerequisite for work.

**30. What is the right to personal safety?**

Every person has the right to safety from cruel treatment, physical violence or random arrest. Often due to people's fear of HIV and AIDS or lack of knowledge on the modes of transmission, people living with HIV and high-risk populations are subjected to this violation of their safety which leads to their further marginalization within society.