

## 30 HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)



Many people in every country of the world have HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. With the right medicines and good working and living conditions, people with HIV can stay healthy, work, and raise families. Workers can help stop the spread of HIV by only having sex in ways that do not pass the virus, getting tested for HIV regularly, conducting HIV education and prevention programs in the factory, and helping workers with HIV keep their jobs as long as they are able to work.

Since people spend so much time at work, factories should develop comprehensive HIV programs that include:

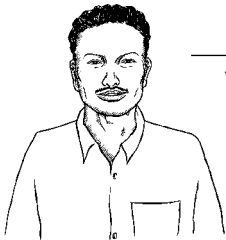
- free, confidential testing for HIV, or time off to get tested.
- non-discrimination policies against workers who are HIV-positive.
- safety trainings to reduce the risk of infections that might result from accidents or injuries at work.
- time off for workers with HIV to take care of their health and the health of family members.
- information about HIV prevention, transmission, and services — including HIV counseling, testing, and treatment — for all workers and their families.
- support for safer sex, such as free condom distribution.

## What you need to know about HIV

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a virus which causes AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). There is still no cure for HIV, but people with HIV can now live long and healthy lives by taking ART (Anti-Retroviral Therapy) medicines, getting prompt medical care when needed, eating nutritious food, drinking clean water, having decent housing, and getting emotional and spiritual support.

Without treatment, HIV slowly destroys the body's immune system — the parts of the body that help fight infection and recover from sickness. Overwork, malnutrition, exposure to some chemicals, and illnesses can also weaken the immune system. Without treatment and proper care, people with HIV usually get very sick with health problems and diseases, such as TB (tuberculosis) and pneumonia. When the person's immune system gets so weak that their body can no longer fight illness or heal, they will die. But AIDS is preventable if HIV is diagnosed and treatment is started.

People with HIV can look and feel strong. And a person who does not have HIV can be sick and have some of the same symptoms as someone with HIV. The only way to know for sure if a person has HIV is to get a test.




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*Work keeps us going and enables us to bring home food and medicine. When we are healthy and when we have access to HIV medicines, we can continue to work just as long as workers who do not have HIV.*

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### Signs of HIV

People can have HIV for many years before they have any signs of illness. Often the first signs to appear are:

- swollen lymph glands in the neck, armpits, or groin
- frequent fevers and night sweats
- weight loss
- tiredness
- decreased appetite
- diarrhea
- white spots (thrush) in the mouth
- for women, frequent vaginal yeast infections

These signs can also be caused by other problems. Getting tested for HIV when you first notice these signs will help you begin treatment earlier, when you are still strong.

## How HIV is passed from one person to another

HIV lives in body fluids — blood, semen, wetness in the vagina, and breast milk. When any of these fluids from an infected person’s body gets inside another person’s body, the virus can spread. This can happen when:



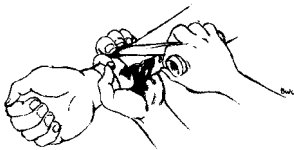
a person with HIV has sex with another person and does not use a condom.



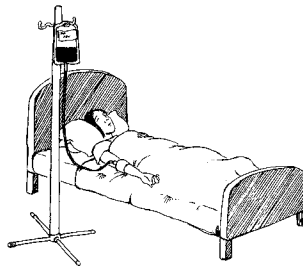
a person’s skin is pierced or cut with a needle or other tool that has not been properly cleaned.



A woman who is pregnant with HIV or becomes infected during pregnancy can pass the virus to her baby. HIV can also be spread through breastfeeding.



blood from an infected person gets into a cut or open wound on another person’s body.



In places where blood is not tested for HIV, people can also get HIV from blood transfusions.

The HIV virus does not live in other body fluids such as sweat, tears, or saliva. It cannot live outside the body, in the air or in the water, for more than a few minutes.

### You cannot give or get HIV by:

- sharing cups, dishes, chairs, tools, workstations, or telephones
- sharing food and drinks
- sharing bathrooms
- touching, hugging, or kissing
- sneezing or coughing (HIV is not passed like the flu or TB)
- mosquito bites (HIV is not passed like malaria)

## Women are at greater risk than men

It is more difficult for women to protect themselves from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) than it is for men. Factory bosses, husbands, and boyfriends expect young women to be obedient. Men are often unwilling to listen to women's concerns about sexual health. When a man refuses to use a condom, many women feel powerless to refuse sex.

Rape and sexual assault harm women more than men. When sex is forced, a woman's genitals are often injured. If her attacker has HIV, the infection can pass more easily to the woman through cuts in her vagina (see First aid after rape on pages 327 to 328).

Not using a condom increases your risk of getting other STIs. Having an STI increases your chances of getting HIV because they often cause open sores on the genitals. See pages 388 to 389 for information about preventing and treating STIs.



**Using a condom every time you have sex helps protect you and your partner from HIV and other STIs.**

## The HIV test

The only way to know for sure if you or someone else has HIV is to get tested. There are 2 types of tests. The viral test looks for the virus in your blood, takes longer to give results, and is more expensive but is also more trustworthy. The antibody test (rapid test) looks for your body's reaction to HIV, gives results in less than 1 hour, and is less expensive.

After the virus has entered the body, it takes 1 to 3 months for it to show on a test. If you think you may have been exposed to HIV but the test does not show any infection, it is a good idea to get tested again after 3 months. Always use a condom. If the virus is in your body, it can pass from one person to another even if it does not yet show up on a test.

Many communities have free rapid testing services. If a person tests positive for HIV on a quick test, the clinic or health worker will usually run a viral test to be certain.

HIV tests should be:

- free or low cost.
- voluntary — no one should be forced to take an HIV test.
- confidential — the results should be shared only with the person being tested, not the boss!



*Respect the privacy of others as you would like your own privacy to be respected. Don't spread rumors or "news."*

### **Counseling is part of testing**

A counselor will explain how the test works and answer your questions about the test before you take it. When the results are ready, the counselor will meet with you in a private space and explain them. If the results show that you have HIV, she will give you information about clinics, treatment, and other services and support groups in your community. Although HIV cannot be cured, you can manage it and lead a healthy and active life.

### **Getting support from your community**

Any person who is ill can feel better and heal better if she or he has support, love, and understanding from family, co-workers, and community. People with HIV need support: treat them with kindness and respect, fight against discrimination and for free treatment, work for better conditions in the workplace, and do not gossip or spread rumors.

## **Medicines to manage HIV**

As soon as you test positive for HIV, look for an HIV care and treatment program. These programs can provide you with the resources you need to stay healthy. Anti-retroviral therapy (ART) medicines can help your body strengthen its immune system to fight HIV infection, but small amounts of the HIV virus will always remain hidden in the body.

Using ART means taking a combination of at least 3 anti-retroviral medicines every day. The medicines available may differ depending on where you live. They might be combined into one pill, or they might come in 3 separate pills. But what is the same everywhere is that once you begin taking ART, the medicines must be taken every day and at the same time. A person taking ART will gain weight, and look and feel healthier. But if he stops taking ART, or misses doses of the medicine, or takes it at the wrong times, then the HIV can become stronger and make him sick again.

Women with HIV who are pregnant should also take ART. It will help them be healthier and protect their babies from being born with HIV.

Another medicine, cotrimoxazole, can be taken daily to help prevent infections. Cotrimoxazole is often a part of HIV treatment programs.

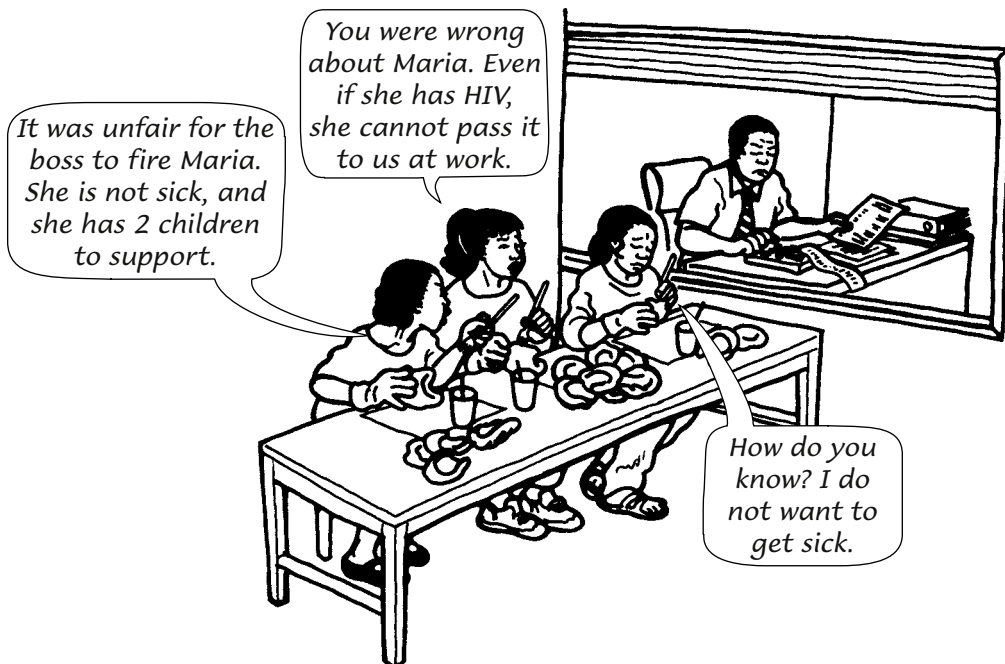
ART is becoming less costly and more available. Government health clinics as well as factory clinics may offer ART at low or no cost.

## HIV in the factory

It is harder for people with HIV to get treatment and live healthy lives when they face stigma in their communities or workplaces. Stigma means the negative beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors people direct at those who have HIV. Stigma includes shaming, insulting, and gossiping about people with HIV, and even acting violently against them. Stigma comes from fears and misinformation about HIV and pushes people to hide their HIV status.

Workers with HIV also face discrimination from bosses. In some places, employers demand an HIV test before hiring. Others fire workers with HIV or thought to have HIV. When workers with HIV cannot get or keep jobs, they are even less likely to get care or stay healthy.

In factories where people with HIV keep their jobs, they may still face discrimination, such as denial of health insurance, pay raises, promotions, and even denial of permission to use the toilet. For more about discrimination, see chapter 21.



Fear of HIV keeps people from taking care of their own health and the health of others.

## Activity

## HIV is not transmitted at work

1. Divide the group into pairs and ask them to discuss how they fear HIV spreads in the factory. Have them call out their fears and write them on the board. Be ready with ideas to help start the discussion if necessary.



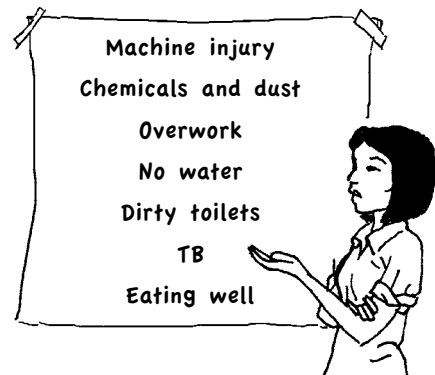
2. Choose a fear from the list to conduct a role play (for how to do a role play, see page 325). For example, if one fear is “shaking hands,” do a role play where a person with HIV greets his or her supervisor by extending their hand in a handshake. What will the person do? Why do people think this contact could lead to HIV infection? Have people explore what is really behind their fear.
3. Review as a group the HIV information on the previous pages, focusing on How HIV is passed from one person to another and How you cannot give or get HIV. Ask people to say if they still think each action on the list could spread HIV.

**NOTE:** “Sharp objects” is the only item on this list where there could be HIV transmission: when a worker is injured and there is blood. If this comes up in your discussion, talk about how HIV spreads through contact with blood and how using gloves or plastic bags can prevent infection. For ways to safely help injured workers who are bleeding, see page 203. People who are raped or coerced to have sex can also be at risk of HIV infection. See First aid after rape on pages 327 to 328.

**Activity****HIV is a disability, not an inability**

Workers living with HIV can continue working without putting other workers at risk. As with other disabilities, it is possible to make the workplace safe for people with HIV. While dangers such as overwork, unsafe equipment, dirty bathrooms, bad food, lack of ventilation, and others are problems for all workers, these dangers are particularly harmful to workers with HIV. People with HIV can become sick more easily and are more likely to die from common illnesses. Improving conditions for workers with HIV will bring improvements for all workers.

1. Make a list of work dangers that workers face in the factory.
2. Going down the list, ask workers to compare how each danger affects healthy workers versus workers with HIV. You can also use this activity to talk about how some dangers affect pregnant women, people with physical or mental disabilities, and other vulnerable workers.



	Healthy workers	Workers with HIV
Machine injury	Get hurt. Injury. Amputation	Same as healthy. Other workers can get infected. Maybe nobody will want to help
Chemicals and dust	Irritants. Asthma. Coughing	Same as healthy. Immune system. Might get sick more
Overwork	Tired. Exhaustion. Stress	Same. Might get sick more
No Water	Everybody needs water	Get dehydrated more easily
Dirty toilets	Filth makes everyone sick	They can get very sick and can die from germs in water or toilets
Eating well	Get hungry. Tired. Dizzy	Same as healthy. Can become very ill from not eating enough food
TB	Get very sick. Needs treatment	Gets TB more easily and TB can kill a person with HIV more quickly





## The rights of people with HIV in the workplace



Based on the **Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111)**, the **Social Security Convention (No. 102)**, and the **Occupational Safety and Health Convention (No. 155)**, the **ILO HIV and AIDS Recommendation (No. 200)** says employers must address HIV and AIDS in the workplace:

- Recognize HIV and AIDS as workplace issues.
- Take steps at work to limit the spread and effects of the HIV epidemic.
- Eliminate discrimination against workers living with HIV. HIV tests must not be required of job seekers, and having HIV should not cause workers to lose their jobs.
- Provide a healthy and safe work environment for all workers and accommodate the needs of workers living with HIV as much as possible.
- Focus on HIV prevention through information and education.
- Offer health care that includes treatment for workers with HIV.
- Facilitate access to HIV treatment, care, and support.

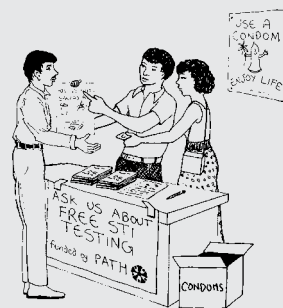
The roles of the UN, ILO, and other international organizations that promote workers' rights are explained in Appendix A.

## HIV programs in the factory

Your group or union can educate at work and in the community about how HIV is spread and prevented. Your members can learn how to counter wrong ideas about HIV, distribute free condoms, and publicize organizations that offer HIV tests and medicines. You can help people with HIV get access to treatment and services so they can live long, healthy lives and contribute to the community.

### Training peer educators

The Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) trained us to become HIV peer educators in our factories. We learned about prevention, HIV testing, and condoms. The company gives us a space in front of the factory to distribute condoms, explain how to use them, and hand out pamphlets about HIV programs in our community. Sometimes we also give information to workers' families in town.



## Workplace programs

Some campaigns focus on showing employers how they benefit from keeping workers healthy. Others focus on workers' right to health. In places where many people have HIV, it is clear that HIV programs at work prevent turnover and maintain the quality of production.

A comprehensive HIV program in factories should include:

- free and confidential HIV testing, or time off for workers to get tested.
- confidentiality regarding HIV status.
- a policy prohibiting discrimination against workers who have HIV.
- training in safety and health practices that reduce the risk of infection when accidents happen. If accidents lead to blood exposure, the factory should make available PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) treatment to prevent HIV (see *Where Women Have No Doctor*, page 521).
- time off for workers with HIV to care for their health or the health of family members.
- free workshops about HIV prevention, transmission, and treatment.
- support for safer sex, such as free condoms.
- health care services — including HIV counseling, testing, and treatment — for all workers and their families.
- tuberculosis testing, treatment and prevention, because TB is common in people with HIV (see chapter 31).

### Factory pays for ART

The Volkswagen car manufacturing company started an HIV program in their factory in Brazil in 1996 to respond to the growing number of their workers and managers who have HIV. Like most HIV programs, it includes HIV testing. For those who test positive, Volkswagen offers a treatment package that includes care by medical specialists, free medicines, and clinical monitoring of ART treatment, home care, and help returning to work after illness.

The Volkswagen program also includes testing, treatment, and support for workers' families. With this care and support, almost 90% of the workers with HIV are active and without symptoms. Another part of the program is a strong education effort. Workers are invited to trainings about HIV and then supported in sharing information with their co-workers. Many companies are scared of starting an HIV program that includes free or subsidized ART, but this program (and many others around the world) actually saves money by keeping skilled workers with HIV healthy instead of hiring new people all the time.