

# I Have HIV – Now What?

HIV is human immunodeficiency virus. It is the virus that causes AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome). AIDS means you cannot fight serious disease or infection.

If you have HIV, your two goals should be:

- ◆ Keeping yourself as healthy as possible
- ◆ Not spreading HIV to others

Following the advice on this sheet will help you reach **both** of these goals.

## Accept services to help you stay healthy

A state agency will get in touch with you once they learn you have HIV. They want to connect you with services to help you pay for anti-retroviral therapy (ART) and meet other needs.

## See a doctor *right away*

Do this even if you don't feel sick. The sooner you see a doctor, the sooner you can start treatment. At the visit, the doctor will do a complete checkup and lab tests.

Always talk to the doctor, clinic staff, or caseworker about any problems that can make it hard to stay on ART, such as:

- ◆ Paying for the meds
- ◆ Alcohol or drug abuse
- ◆ No ride to the doctor
- ◆ Side effects of meds
- ◆ Not wanting others to know you have HIV

## The doctor will learn from your blood tests:

- ◆ How well your body is fighting HIV and your viral load (how much HIV is in your body)
- ◆ What ART medicines are right for you
- ◆ If you have other health problems to treat
- ◆ If you have another sexually transmitted disease (STD) to treat

## At your doctor visit, you will learn:

- ◆ How ART helps and its side effects.
- ◆ Tips on how to tell others you have HIV.
- ◆ Answers to your questions. Write down questions before the visit. Take a friend or family member with you to remind you of questions and take notes.
- ◆ How to not spread HIV to others.



## Take your HIV meds for life

Make up your mind right now that you will take your HIV meds every day for the rest of your life. The meds can't cure HIV, but will control the virus. Taking HIV meds are the **best thing** to:

- ◆ Keep you healthy.
- ◆ Stop you from getting AIDS. If you don't take meds, risk of AIDS is much greater.
- ◆ Stop spread of HIV to others. Lower viral load means less risk of giving it to others.

Even if you have put off starting meds, it is not too late. Meds can still help you.

## Tell your sex or drug-using partners and your doctors you have HIV

### It's the right thing to do – and the law

The Arkansas Department of Health will contact you. They want to know about anyone you may have exposed to HIV. They want to tell them to get an HIV test. They will not share your name.

You must do your part. You could be charged with a crime in Arkansas and other states, if you know you have HIV and don't tell:

- ◆ Sex partners **before** you have sex (oral, vaginal, anal) with them
- ◆ Fellow drug users **before** you share drugs, needles, or works
- ◆ Doctors or dentists that you see as a patient

## What to tell partners

Talk to them about:

- ◆ **Meds to stop HIV.** Meds can help prevent spread of HIV between partners. Your partner needs to go to a doctor or health clinic **right away**. If the sex was very recent, the meds may stop the infection completely. The partner needs to go even if they don't think they have HIV.
- ◆ **HIV test.** Partners need to know if they have HIV or other STDs. Even if the test says no HIV, they need to retest in three months to be sure.
- ◆ **HIV care.** If a partner has HIV, they need to get on HIV meds for life. They need to do all they can to stay healthy and not spread HIV to others.
- ◆ **Safe sex.** All partners should always use a condom during sex with you or anyone else. See other safe sex advice below.

## Practice safe sex

- ◆ Use a condom the right way every time you have sex, ANY type sex.
- ◆ Choose sex that is less risky for spreading HIV: Oral sex is least risky. Anal sex is most risky.

**Drug users:** If you inject drugs, never share your needles or works with anyone.



Your Health. Our Priority.  
[arminorityhealth.com](http://arminorityhealth.com)

Sources:  
NIH, hiv.gov, CDC