The ABCs of dealing with HIV and AIDS

ABSTINENCE

HIV is primarily transmitted by the exchange of body fluids such as blood, pre-semen fluids, semen and vaginal fluids. Abstinence from casual sex is therefore one of the best ways to protect yourself against infection. Always remember that it is your right to say "No" to sex.

BE FAITHFUL

Having multiple sexual partners increases your risk of contracting HIV. A monogamous and faithful relationship can greatly reduce your risk of contracting HIV, as it means that you and your partner only have sexual relations with each other. Even then, both you and your partner should get tested for HIV before engaging in sexual relations, as you may not be aware of each other’s sexual histories. It can also be a good idea to have regular HIV tests.

CONSISTENT & CORRECT USE OF CONDOMS

If you choose not to abstain from having sex, then you should always practise safe sex. Using a condom correctly each time you have sex can be an effective means of preventing and protecting yourself from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Protect yourself through responsible condom use.

DON’T SHARE NEEDLES, DON’T DO DRUGS

Drug users who share needles when taking drugs are at increased risk of contracting HIV.

EDUCATION, EARLY DETECTION AND EDUCATION

HIV has no obvious tell-tale signs, and the only way to find out if you have HIV is to get tested. The HIV test detects the presence of HIV antibodies which are produced by the body in response to a HIV infection. Most people will develop HIV antibodies within one to three months of infection. However, depending on the individual, it can take anywhere between one to six months for the body to produce enough HIV antibodies to be detected by a HIV test. If you suspect that you may have been exposed to HIV, get yourself tested at least one month after the possible exposure. You should also take extra precautions by abstaining from sex until you get tested.

Please speak with a medical professional for more information about HIV, or with a registered counselling professional should you wish to access HIV-related counselling support.

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