

HIV and AIDS

What is HIV and AIDS?

HIV is the human immunodeficiency virus. AIDS, or acquired immunodeficiency syndrome is a late stage in the disease process in a person infected with HIV. In a person suffering from AIDS there is loss of immune system function and body's natural ability to fight infections.

How does HIV spread?

HIV is known to spread through blood, semen, vaginal secretions and human milk. The different ways in which HIV can be spread include:

- ❖ Sexual intercourse
- ❖ Sharing contaminated needles
- ❖ Breast feeding
- ❖ Blood and blood product transfusion
- ❖ From an infected mother to her child before or around the time of birth
- ❖ Exposure of broken skin or mucous membranes to blood or body fluids contaminated with HIV.

No vaccine is yet available to prevent HIV infection. However HIV is extremely unlikely to spread from one child to another in a day care.

How can you test for HIV?

Special blood tests are available for diagnosing HIV infection. For children younger than 18 months of age the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a more sensitive and direct test for detection of the virus. In international adoptees, we advise testing for HIV infection in the immediate post-adoptive period and 6 months post-adoption.

Is there a cure for HIV?

Although a lot of effort is going on, there is still no cure for HIV and AIDS. However, several new drugs are available that decrease the amount of virus in the body and prolong life.

Why is HIV important in International Adoptions?

Fortunately, very few internationally adopted children have arrived with HIV infection. However, with increasing spread of AIDS worldwide and availability of younger children for adoption, some experts anticipate that there will be more cases among international adoptees.