HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. It is the virus that can lead to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome or AIDS if not treated. No effective cure currently exists, but with proper medical care, HIV can be controlled. HIV attacks the body’s immune system, specifically the CD4 cells (T cells), which help the immune system fight off infections. Untreated, HIV reduces the number of CD4 cells (T cells) in the body, making the person more likely to get other infections or infection-related cancers. The medicine used to treat HIV is called antiretroviral therapy or ART. If people with HIV take ART as prescribed, their viral load (amount of HIV in their blood) can become undetectable. If it stays undetectable, they can live long, healthy lives and have effectively no risk of transmitting HIV to an HIV-negative partner through sex. Before the introduction of ART in the mid-1990s, people with HIV could progress to AIDS in just a few years. Today, someone diagnosed with HIV and treated before the disease is far advanced can live nearly as long as someone who does not have HIV.

How is HIV transmitted?
You can get or transmit HIV only through specific activities. Most commonly, people get or transmit HIV through sexual behaviors and needle or syringe use.

Most common:
• HIV can be transmitted only through certain bodily fluids: blood, semen, pre-seminal fluid, rectal fluids, vaginal fluids, and breast milk.
• In the United States, HIV is most commonly transmitted via anal or vaginal sex without using a condom or taking HIV prevention medications.
• HIV can live in a used needle up to 42 days depending on temperature and other conditions. It’s important to never reuse a needles.

Less common:
• Sometimes HIV can be transmitted perinatally (mother to child) during pregnancy, birth, or breastfeeding.
• It is possible, but uncommon, to acquire HIV through a needle stick. This is a risk mainly for health care workers.

How can the risk of contracting an HIV infection be reduced?
To eliminate the risk of contracting HIV:
• Practice abstinence, refrain from all types of sexual activity
• Do not participate in injection drug use
• Maintain a monogamous relationship with a non-infected, non-injection drug using partner

To reduce one’s risk:
• Practice safe sex
  · Reduce number of sexual partners
  · Avoid unprotected anal, vaginal, or oral intercourse as well as other sexual practices that can expose one to bodily fluids
  · Use a latex or polyurethane condom with a water-based lubricant during every sexual act
• Do not share needles or other equipment used for injecting drugs
• Practice universal precautions
• Avoid using alcohol or drugs that may inhibit the ability to make healthy decisions

Who should be tested for HIV?
• Anyone who may have come in contact with infected semen, vaginal secretions, and/or blood
• Anyone who participated in at-risk behaviors such as unprotected sexual activity or injection drug use
• The CDC recommends that everyone between the ages of 13 and 64 get tested for HIV at least once as part of routine health care.
**Testing sites**
OU Health Services laboratory is a confidential testing site. Therefore, the test and test results will be held in strict confidentiality. Information will be shared only with those who have authorized access to medical records.

- OUHS Laboratory (GHC)
  - Telephone - 325-2404
  - Hours - M-F 8:00 am - 4:30 pm
  - No appointment necessary

Anonymous testing may be available at surrounding health care facilities. At an anonymous testing site no personal information is recorded. An identification number will be assigned and this number must be presented when picking up results.

- Cleveland County
  - Telephone - (405) 325-4048

- CDC-INFO
  - Telephone - 1-800-232-4636

**How to get test results and what do they mean?**
Results are usually available approximately one week after testing. Results are not given over the phone.

A negative test result indicates an absence of HIV antibodies in the blood at the time of the test. If tested during the “window period” (the time before the antibodies are produced) a negative test result may not accurately reflect if one is infected. Most people produce antibodies within 3 months of exposure, but some may take as long as 6 months. A negative test does not mean that one is immune to HIV or AIDS or that one cannot become infected with HIV in the future.

A positive test result indicates the presence of HIV antibodies. The infected person will have the virus for life and can transmit the virus to others. A positive result does not mean one has AIDS. Many people who have tested positive have remained healthy for years. One should follow a healthy lifestyle, seek emotional support, and find a supportive and knowledgeable health care provider to discuss treatment. Those who have tested positive have a responsibility to themselves and to others to avoid transmitting the virus.

**What can one do if the test results are positive?**
HIV is a very serious infection. However, due to advanced medical technology many people with HIV are living longer, healthier lives.

**Tips to stay healthy:**
- Find a health care provider who specializes in HIV treatment
- Visit a health care provider on a regular basis
- Take all medication(s) as prescribed
- Get all immunizations as prescribed
- Refrain from using alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs not prescribed by a health care provider
- Eat a healthy and nutritious diet
- Participate in regular physical activity
- Get enough sleep and stay well rested

**What is AIDS?**
AIDS stands for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome. AIDS is the third and final stage of an HIV infection. The progression of HIV/AIDS depends on viral activity, strength of someone’s immune system, and treatment. These opportunistic infections or cancers take advantage of a very weak immune system and signal that the person has AIDS, the last stage of HIV infection.