

# Positively Safe

## THE INTERSECTION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & HIV/AIDS

### HIV/AIDS Risk Factors & Risk Reduction

#### Risk Factor

Engaging in specific activities and/or being exposed to certain situations can put an individual at greater risk for contracting HIV. The following factors are known to be methods through which HIV is transmitted:

- Sexual assault or abuse.
- Sharing needles, body piercing, or tattooing equipment.
- Sharing drug preparation equipment and/or works.
- Engaging in unprotected sex (anal or vaginal) with an HIV infected person.
- Mother-to-child transmission through pregnancy, labor, delivery, or breastfeeding.

#### Other risk factors include:

- Engaging in sexual activity with a partner whose HIV status is not known
- Having vaginal sex without a condom, which is considered a high-risk behavior for HIV infection.<sup>i</sup> since during vaginal sex, HIV is transmitted from men to women more easily than from women to men.<sup>i</sup>
- Having an STI - the risk for transmission is increased if you currently have another sexually transmitted infection (STI) or vaginal infection. However, many STIs and vaginal infections are "silent" – meaning you don't have any symptoms – so you may not be aware that you are infected.<sup>i</sup>
- Using barrier methods that are used to prevent pregnancy (e.g., diaphragm, cervical cap, etc.) **but that do not** protect against STIs or HIV infection – some barrier methods still allow infected semen to come in contact with the lining of the vagina.<sup>i</sup>
  - Oral or hormonal contraceptives (i.e., birth control pills) also **do not** protect against STIs or HIV infection.<sup>1</sup>.
- Having sex with more than one person without getting tested again - It is recommended that individuals with multiple sexual partners should be tested every 3-6 months.

#### Risk Reduction

The risk of transmitting and acquiring HIV can be reduced by incorporating specific practices into your everyday life, especially while engaging in sexual activity. The following list describes practices that may reduce the risk of contracting HIV:

- Use of condoms, both male and female, if used correctly and consistently.
- Getting tested for HIV and confirming your partner's HIV status before engaging in sexual activity.
- Taking medication when pregnant and during labor can prevent mother-to-child transmission.
- Avoid sharing needles – use clean needles and use them only once.

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- Do not share any preparatory drug equipment – do not cook, mix, or inject drugs with another person’s equipment.
- Use water-based lubricant, NOT oil-based lubricant (e.g., petroleum jelly or hand lotion) because the oils destroy the condom and cause it to break.<sup>ii</sup>
- Avoid sexual activity if you or your partner has an active, known STI.<sup>ii</sup>
- Use a dental dam or plastic wrap when engaging in anal or oral sex.<sup>ii</sup>
- Use a licensed tattoo or piercing service that complies with universal precautions.<sup>ii</sup>
- If you had a serious exposure that poses a demonstrated risk for HIV infection, post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) treatment can be used immediately and can significantly reduce the likelihood of the exposure resulting in an infection.<sup>ii</sup>

### *Additional Resources:*

- Learn more about how to begin a conversation about HIV with the **HIV/AIDS Conversation Guide** in the *Positively Safe Toolkit*.
- Find more information on how **Universal Precautions, Medication Storage & Access, and Linkage to and Retention in Care** can reduce risk of transmission and improve the health of individuals living with HIV in the *Positively Safe Toolkit*.
- Get more information about how service providers can have conversations about **Safety Planning** when discussing risk reduction in the *Positively Safe Toolkit*.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/prevention/reduce-your-risk/sexual-risk-factors/>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.mnaidsproject.org/education/educate-yourself/hiv-risk-reduction.php>