

Do you want me to explain what HIV is?



Hello! I am Dalitso and this is my sister Memory.

Our family is like all families, we have good moments and bad moments. Sometimes we are worried about things that happen to us, and some of them make us sad.

Dad, Mom and I are infected with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). We are not different from other people but we must be careful with our health and go to hospital for check-ups and to get the medicines that we need. Memory, my sister, does not have the virus.

I was a little ill, but now I'm fine.



Do you want me to explain what HIV is? Yes?
Here we go:
The HIV is a virus.

A virus, but what virus? – I asked to my doctor.

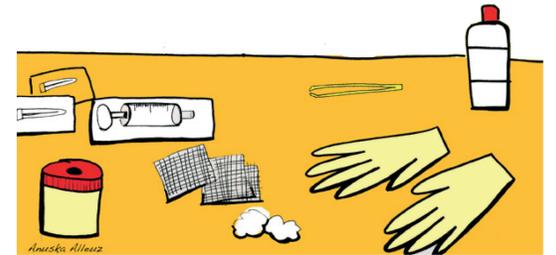
A virus called HIV, which stands for "Human Immunodeficiency Virus".

"V" because it is a virus.
"I" because it infects the body's immune system.
And "H" because it infects humans.

If you are infected with HIV it is possible that, at first, you are okay. But then, if you are not careful and do not take the medicines the doctor tells you, you can become ill.

How I can know whether I am infected or not?

With a test to see if the virus is your blood. You can also ask to get this test done although you don't feel ill.



If you have the virus, you are infected and you have to take care of yourself, you must take the medicines the doctor gives you and you must follow his recommendations. HIV inspires respect, but this does not mean being afraid of people infected. It is important to know that the virus can only enter in your body by one of these three ways:

- Through sexual intercourse, without the protection of a condom, because HIV lives in fluids or sexual secretions of men and women.
- By having contact with the blood of an infected person, but nowadays this is very unlikely to happen.
- Finally you should know that women infected with HIV, if they do not take the medicines to control the virus, can transmit HIV to their babies during pregnancy, at birth or during breastfeeding.

If you are careful, you can avoid becoming infected. Anyways, you can be sure that there is no danger for living with a person infected with HIV.



I will explain the case of John and Maphatso (Maphatso is infected with HIV, but John is not). What if the blood of John gets in touch with Maphatso's blood? John could become infected with the virus.

What if Maphatso and John love each other and decide to have sex without a condom? John could also become infected with the virus.

What if Maphatso had a baby? The child might be infected.

But keep calm, because these three situations can be avoided simply by following these advices:

1) Not having contact with the blood of other people.

2) Using a condom to protect yourself and your partner during sex, means practicing safe sex. Another common route of HIV transmission is unprotected sex. The virus is found in body fluids, so if you use a condom during sex it acts as a barrier and prevents contact of body fluids between partners. Unwanted pregnancies can also be avoided with the use of condoms, as well as other sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

3) Take the necessary medication during pregnancy and childbirth if you are a mother infected with HIV. The baby also should take it during the early stages of his life.

If you are a mum and you are infected it is very important that you take the medication during pregnancy and during the entire time you breastfeed your baby so you can prevent it from becoming infected.



A pregnant woman who is infected with HIV, who did not visit the doctor and who is not taking medication for these cases, can transmit the infection to the baby.

For women who wish to become pregnant, it is important to know whether they are infected with HIV or not.

If the HIV test is positive, pregnant women have to take antiretroviral medication to stay well and avoid transmitting the virus to the baby.

Please note that the baby will be inside their mother for nine months, and during that time it will be fed through the umbilical cord and placenta. As you still cannot remove the virus from infected individuals, mothers infected with HIV can transmit the virus during pregnancy, during childbirth or breastfeeding.

As I said before, it is very important that you take good care of mothers before and during pregnancy. There is a possibility, if you have not taken antiretroviral medication during pregnancy, that the doctor gives you your medication dose during labor to protect the baby from infection.

Please remember that if you are a mum and you are infected you must take your medication during pregnancy and during time you breast-feed your baby.



Used needles can act as a vector for HIV transmission and can cause infection. If you decide to get pierced ears, nose or any type of cut, make sure the material you use is single-use and sterile.

You should also be careful not to share utensils / household toiletries, such as toothbrushes, scissors, nail clippers or razors.

You must not share needles with others, if you are drug-addict, because it can transmit the virus.

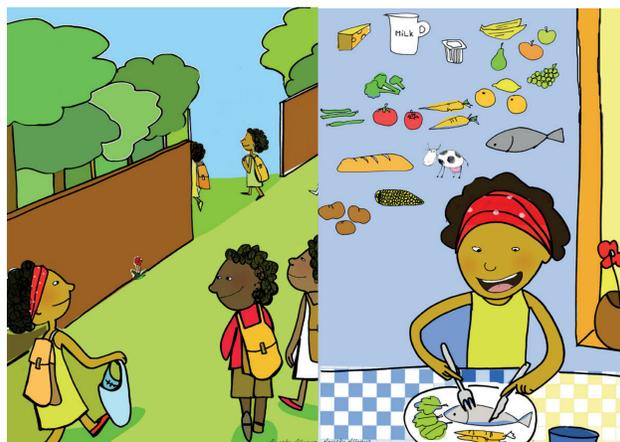
Oh, and if you hurt yourself, and someone "touches" the blood, nothing happens. The disease could be transmitted only if your blood gets directly in contact with the open wound of another person and this is very unlikely!

This is why doctors use gloves to protect themselves when they have to assist wounded people who are bleeding. However when HIV is outside the body, it has a very short life-time.



When you are infected with HIV, the most important thing is to take the medication everyday, very carefully, and keep a healthy lifestyle.

The medication helps to prevent the virus from destroying important cells of our body. That's the reason why you must take it carefully every day and you should try not to skip any medicine or dose.



It is also important you do your best to rest, to eat a balanced diet, not to consume toxic substances, and to do social activities, such as going to school or work.

In general, you have to keep a lifestyle as healthy as possible.



It is true that some people are very afraid of HIV infection, and others have prejudices.

That's why I wanted to tell you about the most important things you should know related with HIV.

Information about your health is confidential, means it has to be kept in secret. This means that only doctors and health professionals who care for you need to know whether you are infected or not. You are free to decide who you want to tell about it, and you, better than anyone else, can choose who deserves your trust.

(*) Source: 2010, WHO Guidelines for ANTIRETROVIRAL drugs for treating pregnant women and preventing HIV infection in infants. Recommendations for a public health approach.

