

Let's stop HIV together.™



Stigma Fact Sheet

After more than 30 years, HIV-related stigma continues to be a barrier that we must overcome to reach the goal of an AIDS-free generation in the United States. We all have a role to play in stopping HIV, and it starts with supporting people living with HIV and talking about HIV with our friends, families, and loved ones.



What is stigma?

Stigma is shame and disgrace that result from prejudice associated with something regarded as socially unacceptable. Stigma around HIV includes certain words, beliefs, and actions that have negative meaning for those at high risk for getting HIV or those already living with HIV. Here are a few examples:

- Referring to people as HIVers or Positives
- Believing that only certain groups of people can get HIV
- Refusing casual contact with someone living with HIV
- Making moral judgments about people who take steps to prevent HIV transmission
- Socially isolating a member of a community because they are HIV positive
- Refusal by a health care professional to provide high-quality care or services to a person living with HIV

Ongoing stigma in our communities leads to perceived discrimination, fear, and anxiety. It affects the emotional well-being and mental health of people living with HIV and prevents some from getting tested and treated for HIV.



Ways you can stand up against stigma.

- **Get the facts.** Sharing information can help reduce misunderstanding and decrease stigma associated with HIV.

According to the CDC . . .

- More than 1.2 million people in the United States are living with HIV.
- Approximately 45,000 Americans become infected with HIV every year.
- About 1 in 8 people living with HIV don't know they have it.
- If you find out you are HIV positive, you can start taking medicine for your HIV. Getting treated for HIV improves your health, prolongs your life, and greatly lowers your chance of spreading HIV to others.



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Myths, Busted

- HIV is not spread by hugging, shaking hands, sharing toilets, sharing dishes, or closed-mouth or “social” kissing with someone who is HIV positive.
- You can’t get HIV from consuming food handled by an HIV-infected person. Even if the food contains a small amount of HIV-infected body fluids, exposure to the air, heat from cooking, and stomach acid will destroy the virus.
- HIV is not spread by mosquitoes, ticks, or other insects.

Get tested. Testing is the only way to know if you are HIV positive but many people avoid testing because of stigma. Knowing your status may empower you to talk openly about what it’s like to get tested and encourage others to do the same.

For more information about testing and to find a testing site near you, visit www.CDC.gov/DoingIt.

Get involved. Every conversation we have about HIV helps eliminate the stigma that is often associated with the disease. These conversations can happen in person but they can also be over the phone, or online. Every voice matters, no matter how the message is shared.

Talk the talk on social media

Conversations don’t have to be face-to-face. You can have a big impact by talking about HIV virtually through social media. Whether you blog, tweet, or snap, here are some tips to make sure your message is speaking out against stigma.

- Keep language general. Using exaggerated phrases or exclamation marks in some contexts may fuel stigma, discrimination, fear, and anxiety.
- Tune in and listen to what others are saying. Correct myths about HIV by sharing the facts.
- Avoid words or phrases that promote stigma and misinformation. Use the preferred terms available in the *Let’s Stop HIV Together* Guide to Talking About HIV.

Let’s Stop HIV Together encourages everyone to learn about HIV, talk openly about HIV, and share the facts about HIV.

Visit our website for more tips and information on HIV stigma, and follow us online to join the conversation. Use the hashtag **#StopHIVStigma**.

Get the facts. Get tested. Get involved.

www.cdc.gov/Together/GetInvolved



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