



# How is HIV transmitted?

**Sexual contact** or **sharing drug injecting** equipment are the most common causes of HIV transmission. Sexual contact that may transmit HIV includes vaginal and anal sex, and with lower associated risk, oral sex.

In a small percentage of cases, HIV can be transmitted from **pregnant mother to child**. The risk of this can be reduced if the mother uses anti-HIV drugs during pregnancy and delivery. In Australia breast feeding is not recommended for mothers infected with HIV because of the risk of HIV being transmitted through breast milk.

Healthcare workers and emergency personnel are at low risk of acquiring HIV from workplace exposure to HIV (for example by **needlestick injury**). A drug treatment regime called **Post Exposure Prophylaxis** ('PEP') has been shown to be effective in preventing HIV infection in these circumstances.

Blood products have been screened for HIV in **Australia since 1985** and **receiving transfusions of blood products is considered safe**.

There is no evidence of transmission of HIV through ordinary social contact. **HIV is NOT transmitted through:**

- Sharing of plates
- Cups
- Cutlery
- Swimming pools or toilets
- Kissing
- Coughing
- Sneezing
- Spitting

The necessary conditions for HIV transmission (see next page) are not present in these situations.



Image: Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations

HIV positive people need to be hugged too!



# How is HIV transmitted?

## Principles of HIV infection

For someone to get HIV, the following four things must be true:

- 1** **There must be a source of HIV infection.** HIV exists in certain bodily fluids of **persons infected with HIV** (you can't get HIV from someone who doesn't have HIV). These include blood, semen, vaginal fluid and breast milk.
- 2** **There must be a way for HIV to be transmitted to the bloodstream of an uninfected person.** Sexual contact, or sharing drug-injecting equipment are the most common routes of HIV transmission.
- 3** **There must be a person susceptible for infection.** HIV transmission only takes place from one human to another. Mosquitoes, for instance cannot become infected with HIV and pass it on to humans.
- 4** **A sufficient amount of HIV must enter the blood of an uninfected person for infection to be established.** If insufficient HIV enters the bloodstream, transmission of HIV infection will not occur. For example, there is HIV in saliva, but there is so little that you cannot get HIV from kissing.