

What are HIV & AIDS?

What is HIV?

HIV stands for:



Human

(only humans can get HIV: you can't catch HIV from cats, monkeys, birds...)

Immunodeficiency

(it affects your immune system: your body's defense system against illness)

Virus

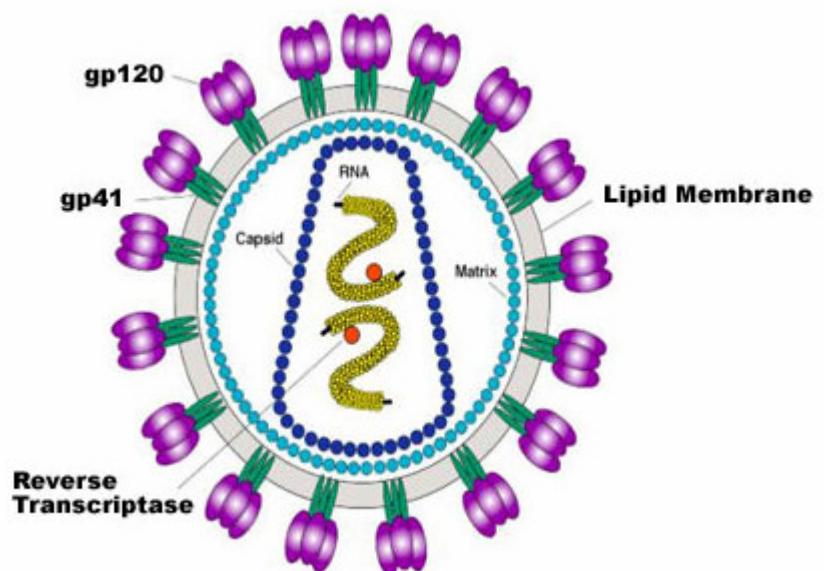
(a small particle which can only survive by living in another organism)

HIV is a type of virus called a *retrovirus*: It incorporates itself into the genetic material of cells called 'CD4 white blood cells', which are part of the immune system. This process is called 'reverse transcription', and it enables HIV to replicate. This leads to destruction of the CD4 cells and damages the immune system.

If someone is **HIV negative** it means they **don't** have HIV in their blood.

If someone is **HIV positive** it means they **do** have HIV in their blood.

You can't tell if someone is HIV positive just by looking at them.



A diagram of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus



What are HIV & AIDS?

What is AIDS?

AIDS stands for:

A	Acquired	(you get it from somewhere: it isn't genetic)
I	mmune	(it affects your immune system: your body's defense system against illness)
D	eficiency	
S	ndrome	(a set of signs and symptoms that occur together, as a result of a specific cause)

HIV causes AIDS by damaging the immune system and making the body vulnerable to '**opportunistic infections**'. These are called 'opportunistic' because the weakened immune system gives them the 'opportunity' to take hold.

These infections can cause death in people were severely weakened immune system.

Not everyone that is HIV positive has AIDS, but you cannot get AIDS if you are not HIV positive. Some people are HIV positive for many years before they get AIDS.

The **Red Ribbon** is an international symbol of AIDS awareness that is worn by people all year round and particularly around World AIDS Day (1st December) to demonstrate care and concern about HIV and AIDS, and to remind others of the need for their support and commitment.

