

Sexual and Reproductive Health of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (WLHA)

A Flip book



Purpose of the flip book

The situation of HIV/AIDS is alarming in India. The number of people infected with HIV is growing every day. But the majority of the infected people themselves are not aware of their HIV status and may therefore be transmitting the virus to others unknowingly.

Sexual health, the state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality, is an important and integral aspect of human development and maturation throughout the life cycle. Complex factors influence human sexual behaviour. These factors affect whether women's sexual experiences lead to good sexual and reproductive health or places them at risk for ill-health. Unfortunately, rather than women having satisfying and safe sexual experiences, their sexuality is often the cause of distress and characterised by unsafe or harmful sexual practices that lead to adverse health outcomes.

Young people and more so young girls and women are more vulnerable to HIV infection than men and older people are. This is primarily due to gender inequalities within our families and communities, reflected in sexual practices and behaviours linked to ignorance and inexperience among women as well as social norms and attitudes that lead to myths and misconceptions.

This flip book on women living with HIV/AIDS (WLWHA) is to assert the right for sexual and reproductive health of women living with HIV/ AIDS. All the dimension's of women's sexual and reproductive health – pregnancy, child birth, breast-feeding, use of contraception, exposure to, diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, and their exposure to sexual violence – are affected, or potentially affected, by HIV. Due to the stigma and discrimination often associated with HIV, it is particularly important that sexual and reproductive rights of women living with HIV are protected. These rights include having access to sexual and reproductive health services and sexuality education; being able to choose a sexual partner, to decide to be sexually active or not, and to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children. Women also have the right to make these decisions free of discrimination, coercion and violence.

This flip book addresses the specific sexual and reproductive health needs of women with HIV/AIDS and explains the family planning, antenatal and postnatal healthcare requirements of women living with HIV/AIDS. It recommends the need for comprehensive healthcare of women living with HIV/AIDS as well as the urgency for counselling, anti-retroviral therapy and care. Improving the sexual and reproductive health of women living with HIV/AIDS, treating HIV infections and preventing new infections is a basic right for the comprehensive well being for all HIV positive women.

How to use the flip book?

Dear User,

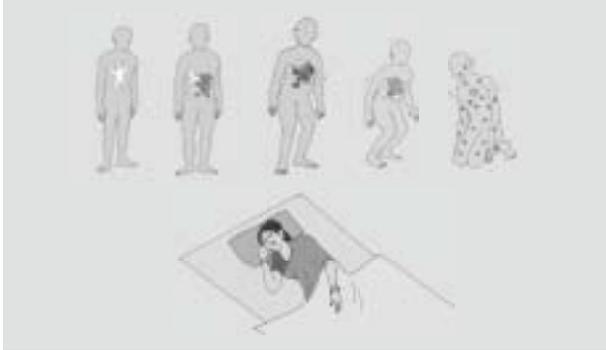
- Use this flip book to talk and discuss about issues related to reproductive and sexual health and HIV/AIDS in women's groups.
- Review the contents of the flip book in advance to familiarise yourself with the contents and messages.
- Each picture is accompanied by discussion points and messages that need to be talked about. The visuals corresponding to the messages are given on the opposite page.
- Build rapport with the group members.
- Gather all the women and seat them in such a manner that they are able to see the flip book clearly. All the group members should be able to have a good view and hear you clearly.
- Face the audience and hold the flip book in such a way that the audience can see the picture and you can see the points that need to be discussed and messages that need to be given out.
- Speak clearly, loudly and slowly.
- Explain each picture to the audience and allow enough time per picture to discuss the main points.
- Ask the audience to repeat the key points to ensure that they understand the messages.



Introduction

- The sexual and reproductive health of women living with HIV/AIDS is fundamental to their physical, emotional and social well being, and that of their partners and children.
- Women living with HIV/AIDS need additional care and counselling during their sexual and reproductive life. Primarily because HIV accelerates the natural history of some reproductive illnesses, increases the severity of others and may affect their ability to become pregnant.
- Violence, including sexual violence against women, is strongly correlated to their risk of becoming HIV positive. It can interfere with their ability to access treatment and care, and maintain adherence to anti-retroviral therapy.
- Health services that ensure the sexual and reproductive health of women living with HIV/AIDS are essential for them to have responsible, safe and satisfying sexual and reproductive lives.





What is HIV?

HIV is

- **Human**
- **Immunodeficiency** means the lack of human body's natural ability to fight diseases.
- **Virus** means a very small organism that causes diseases.

What is being HIV positive?

A person who has HIV in the body is called an HIV positive person.

Different strains of HIV

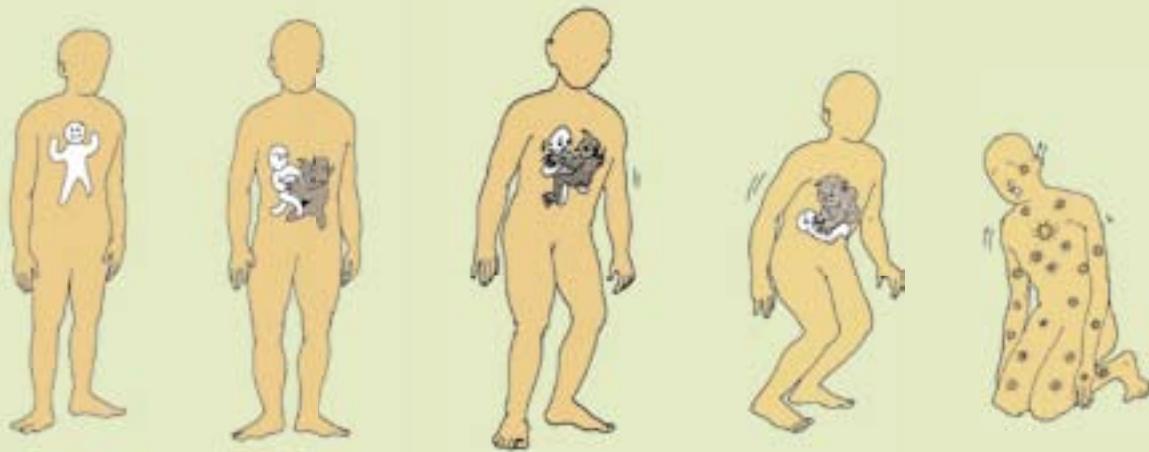
HIV is a highly variable virus that mutates very easily in the human body. This means there are many different strains of HIV, even within the body of a single HIV positive person. Based on genetic similarities, the numerous virus strains may be classified into types,

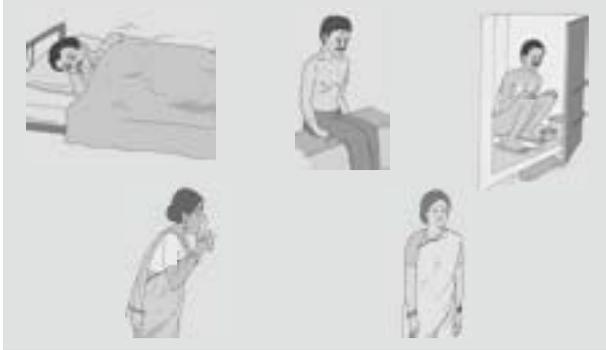
groups and subtypes. HIV-1 and HIV-2 are the most common types of HIV.

How HIV affects our bodies

- HIV infection stops our immune system from being able to protect our body against diseases. Once HIV weakens our immune system, germs take over the body and we get sick.
- As a result, an HIV positive person takes a long time to recover even in minor infections like cold and flu, whereas a healthy person gets better within a few days.

However, it is important to remember: HIV positive people can lead healthy lives and also look healthy for years.





What is AIDS?

HIV is the cause of:

A	Acquired	Something which we get from outside
I	Immune	The capacity to resist infections
D	Deficiency	When the immune system is unable to fight against diseases
S	Syndrome	Means a group of health problems that make up a disease

- In the early stages, an HIV positive person looks and feels perfectly healthy and is able to continue with all the normal day to day functions.
- Over a period of time (4-8 years) as the virus starts multiplying in the body, the immune system becomes weak and the body gets susceptible to various diseases.

- That is the time when the person is said to have AIDS.
- As a result, AIDS is a condition caused by HIV.

Symptoms of AIDS

Prolonged fever, abnormal and rapid weight loss, repeated loose motions, repeated cough/ cold which does not get cured, severe headache, loss of vision, convulsions, skin infection and rash, any infection that does not get cured despite taking medicines

Distinction between HIV and AIDS

- AIDS is an incurable but completely preventable.
- When a person is infected with HIV, it means that the individual is HIV positive. But it is not necessary that each HIV positive person has AIDS.
- Access to proper medicines and treatment helps an HIV positive person to lead a reasonably healthy and normal life. There are medical treatments that can help to slow down the rate at which HIV weakens the immune system. Early detection offers more options for treatment and preventive healthcare.





HIV Transmission

HIV infections do not spread easily. One can get HIV only by exchanging body fluids that have high concentration of HIV.

These fluids are:

- Blood and its products
- Semen
- Vaginal fluid
- Breast milk
- Pre-seminal fluid

It is important to remember that HIV can infect anybody, as it is invisible.

Four ways of HIV transmission

- Unprotected sexual intercourse, whether vaginal, anal or oral, without a condom with an HIV infected person or with different sex partners.
- Use of non-sterile, HIV infected or contaminated syringes and needles.
- Transfusion of untested or HIV infected blood.
- From an HIV positive pregnant woman to the child, before, during or after the birth.





How HIV does not Spread

HIV is not transmitted through:

- Sharing the same toilet or bathroom
- Traveling in the same bus or public transport
- Sitting on or sharing the same place (for example, bed, bench, carpet, etc)
- Mosquito bites
- Blood donation
- Sharing towels or linen or clothes
- Using community showers or swimming pool
- Shaking hands
- Hugging or touching
- Eating from the same utensils
- Kissing





Increased Vulnerability of Women to HIV

Women are more vulnerable to HIV infection than men. A significant proportion of new infections are occurring in married women who get infected by their husbands. Nearly 40 percent of HIV infections in India are among women.

Male dominated sexual practices and attitudes

- Women generally have limited ability to negotiate safe sex or refuse unwanted sex.
- They often cannot request, let alone insist on using a condom or any form of protection.
- If they refuse unprotected sex or request condom use, they often risk abuse, as it causes suspicion of infidelity.

Little or no knowledge of their reproductive system and sexual health

- Women tend to ignore serious symptoms like vaginal discharge or genital swelling in their own body parts and even in their partners.
- They are not able to make connections between sexually transmitted infections and HIV and generally not able to assess its severity.

Biological vulnerability

- The female genitalia are much more vulnerable than male genitalia.
- Male-to-female transmission during unprotected sex is twice as likely to occur as female-to-male.

Cultural practices and early marriage

- Forced and early marriage among girls on attaining puberty increases their vulnerability to sexual problems.
- Women are not encouraged to discuss about sexuality or sexual practices and feel hesitant to discuss about their problems with their partners, peers and even medical practitioners.

Socio-economic circumstances

- Lack of economic independence or economic resources among women reduces their equal status and rights within their families.
- Many women are subjected to domestic violence and sexual abuse, increasing their vulnerability to HIV.





Vulnerabilities due to Poor Knowledge of Sexual and Reproductive Health

Reproductive Tract infections and Sexually Transmitted Infections

Infections in the reproductive system are known as the Reproductive Tract Infections (RTIs). They include sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and other infections of the reproductive system that are not caused by sexual contact. RTIs related complications can be more serious among HIV positive women and infections can be transmitted to the foetus during pregnancy. In women, other infections in the reproductive system may be caused by:

- The overgrowth of bacteria and other organisms that normally live inside the vagina.
- Lack of personal hygiene like not keeping the genitals clean or not

using clean, soap-washed and sun-dried cloth or sanitary napkin or not changing sanitary pads frequently during menstruation.

- Getting an abortion through an untrained Dai or quacks.
- Lack of cleanliness and hygiene during and after delivery.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

- RTIs that spread through sexual contact are called sexually transmitted infections (STIs). They are communicable diseases that are passed from one partner to the other during unprotected sexual intercourse. Both men and women can give STIs to each other.
- Women may contract STIs when they tear the delicate lining of their anus or vagina during vaginal or anal sex. This happens due to the lack of adequate lubrication.





STIs

Symptoms

Both men and women suffer from similar symptoms during STIs.

These include:

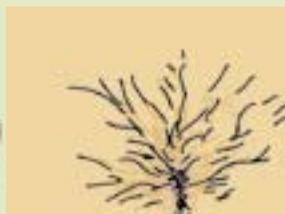
- Sores, lumps, blisters or rashes in or near the genitals or mouth of sex organs
- Burning or pain when urinating or having a bowel movement
- Swelling or redness of the throat
- Fever, chills or aches like flu
- Swelling near the area of sex organs
- Unusual weight loss

In women some other symptoms are:

- White discharge or pus discharge with foul smell from genitals
- Genital itching or unusual swelling around pubic area
- Pain in the pelvic area between the navel and sex organs
- Bleeding from vagina which is not a monthly period
- Lower abdomen pain
- Pain deep inside the vagina during sex

Importance of STIs awareness

- The predominant mode of transmission of both HIV and STIs is sexual. Therefore, measures for preventing sexual transmission of HIV and STI are the same.
- Social myths and misconceptions such as eating raw rice or mud during pregnancy, evil effect of spirits or ghosts, stepping over the urine of a sick person, punishment of sins of previous birth, etc. puts women at a higher risk of getting STIs.
- Infants born to women infected with STIs may contract syphilis, and eye infections, which can led to blindness.





Prevention and Treatment of STIs

Control and prevention of STIs among women living with HIV/AIDS is important because of the strong correlation between the spread of STIs and HIV transmission.

- Systematic screening for STIs, consisting of history taking, clinical examination and laboratory screening for syphilis, is part of the initial clinical examination of an HIV positive woman.
- Appropriate and prompt management of STIs reduces the risk of transmitting HIV to sexual partners and the reproductive-tract and obstetric complications associated with STIs.
- Regular health check-ups and complete treatment based on doctor's prescriptions are important. Self-treatment is not advisable.
- Privacy and confidentiality for consultation and clinical examination is ensured at all health facilities.
- Clinical management alone cannot achieve control over STIs.
- Avoid sex with partners who have genital rashes, redness, sores or foul smelling or blood mix discharge.
- Avoid unprotected multi-partner sexual relationships.
- Use condom correctly and regularly.
- Urinate and wash the genital area after intercourse. This helps in avoiding some genital infections.
- Encourage partner treatment and consult doctors.





Precautions against HIV Transmission

To prevent HIV among women, both men and women should

- Always practice safe sex - use a new condom every time during sexual intercourse. This also reflects sensitivity and respect for the health and well being of the partner.
- Always use only disposable syringes and where they are not available, insist on the doctor to use sterilised syringes.
- Always use sterilised needles or instruments to pierce the skin like during ear or nose piercing.
- Always ensure that blood for transfusion is got from a registered blood bank and is certified "HIV free".
- Ensure prevention of transmission from an HIV positive woman to child.

How effective are condoms in preventing acquiring and transmitting HIV and STIs?

Condoms are very effective in preventing acquiring and transmission of STIs and HIV, if used regularly and correctly. When buying condoms it is important to check:

- Expiry date of condom - do not use one that has passed this date.
- Storage - condoms should be kept away from heat and pressure (for example, away from fire or stove and also do not sit on a purse containing condoms).



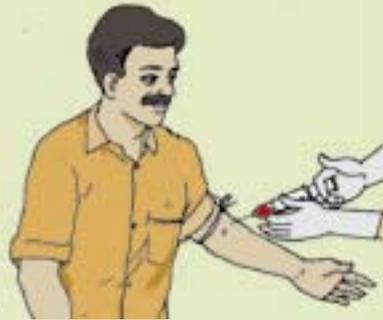


HIV and Sexual Health

HIV testing and counselling is the entry point to HIV-related care and support, including anti-retroviral therapy. Knowledge of HIV status is important for providing reproductive healthcare and counselling according to the HIV status of women and to assist women in making decisions on issues such as the number, spacing and timing of pregnancies, use of contraceptive methods and infant-feeding practices.

Diagnosing HIV infection

- HIV can be detected through a blood test. A person infected with HIV does not show any external signs of infection until progression to AIDS, which can take from six months to ten years.
- When a person is infected with HIV, it generally takes three to six months for the body to produce antibodies to HIV. This is called the 'window period'.
- During the 'window period', a person will not test positive for HIV even if infected.
- The HIV test is available at most government hospitals and Voluntary Counselling and Testing Centres (VCTCs), at a minimal charge.
- The test is confidential and the results are not revealed to anyone but the person taking the test.
- The pre-and post-test counselling by VCTC counsellors helps HIV positive people to clarify all their doubts and cope with the infection emotionally and physically.





Positive Test Results

What happens when the test is positive?

- A positive HIV test indicates that the person is infected with HIV.
- Testing positive does not mean that the person has AIDS.
- People, who test positive for HIV, can stay healthy for many years, provided they take care and treatment.
- This includes care about sexual practices and family planning. Women living with HIV/AIDS need to be very careful during pregnancy to prevent transmission of HIV to the child.

Importance of HIV-related counselling

It is very important for women living with HIV/AIDS to understand that:

- If a person is infected with HIV, one can prevent infecting other sexual partners.
- Their children are at a risk of getting infected during pregnancy, labour and childbirth, and breastfeeding. Therefore, when an HIV positive woman finds out that she is pregnant, she must discuss with her partner and then the couple must inquire about treatment and breastfeeding options to prevent transmission of HIV to the child.
- They and their partners need to make lifestyle changes to help preserve their health and ensure that they lead healthy lives.





Treatment for HIV Positive People

There is no cure for HIV or AIDS. But there are treatments that can help to keep people living with HIV/AIDS healthy.

Anti-retroviral therapy

- The introduction of anti-retroviral therapy is part of HIV clinical care and has transformed HIV infection into a manageable chronic illness.
- Anti-retroviral therapy is not a cure for HIV and cannot completely eradicate HIV.
- Anti-retroviral therapy helps to keep the immune system intact and to inhibit replication of the virus in the body.
- Adherence to anti-retroviral therapy is of utmost importance. Once anti-retroviral therapy is started, it should not be discontinued except under medical circumstances. Adherence means taking correct dose at the correct time and in the correct

way (e.g. right type of food or fluid and before or after meals). If adherence is very good, the amount of HIV in a person's body will reduce very quickly after a few weeks or months.

- Different anti-retroviral drugs attack the virus at different stages of replication of the virus.
- The combination of anti-retroviral drugs help to reduce the level of virus in the blood and thereby improve the immune system.
- The improvement in the immune function of the body helps to reduce other infections and illnesses and results in overall improvement in the quality of life.
- Anti-retroviral drugs help to slow the progression of disease and help to improve the quality of life of HIV positive people.
- Anti-retroviral drugs are also used for 'prophylaxis' or prevention of HIV infection. Therefore, they play a major role in the prevention of transmission of HIV to the child during pregnancy, delivery and breastfeeding.





Family Planning Services for Women Living with HIV/AIDS

Reasons for which HIV positive women seek contraception are mostly the same as those for women not infected with HIV. But there are additional considerations in family planning counselling and selection of contraceptive methods by HIV positive women. Family planning counselling and helping women living with HIV/ AIDS avoid unintended pregnancies are important to prevent HIV among infants.

Benefits of family planning services for HIV positive women and couples

- Improves health and well being of families and communities
 - Spacing/limiting/ timing of births
- Prevents unintended pregnancies, thus reducing:
 - Number of infants born infected
 - Number of future orphans





Contraception and Dual Protection

What is dual protection?

- Dual protection refers to the double or twin protection against, both, unplanned pregnancy and STIs/ HIV.
- Dual protection is possible through the use of condoms alone or the use of condoms together with another effective method of contraception such as contraceptive pills.

Why condoms are so important for dual protection?

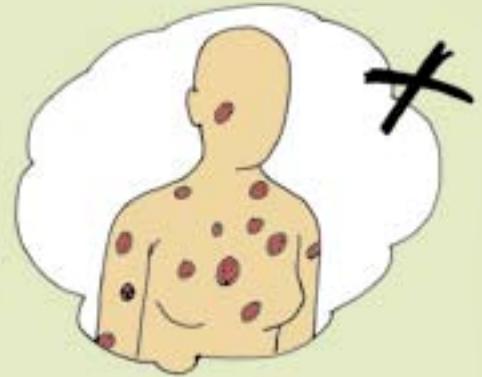
- The male latex condom, when used correctly and consistently, is considered highly effective in preventing, STIs, sexual transmission of HIV and pregnancy at the same time.

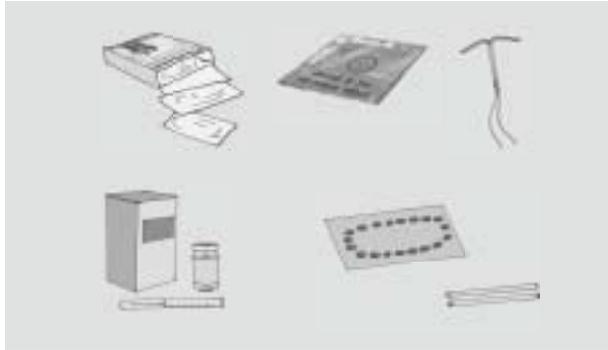
Emphasis on condoms for family planning among couples/ people living with HIV/AIDS is required because:

- Many couples are motivated to use condoms to avoid only pregnancy, rather than STI or HIV prevention.
- The stigma of associating condom use with sex work or sexual promiscuity can be addressed by promoting condoms as effective methods for pregnancy, STIs and HIV prevention.
- Often, women are not aware of the risky sexual practices of their partners and believe that being monogamous themselves is sufficient. It is very important for women to understand that they may be at risk of acquiring STIs and HIV resulting from the risky sexual practices of their partners'.
- Pregnancy and STI and HIV prevention needs are inseparable and should be addressed together.

Importance of dual protection for women living with HIV/AIDS

- Protects against unintended pregnancy.
- Prevents other sexually transmitted infections.
- Prevents re-infection with other HIV strains.





Dual Protection Methods for People Living with HIV/AIDS

Contraceptive methods for HIV positive people are similar to those who are not infected.

Barrier methods or condom usage

- Condoms should be used correctly and during every act of intercourse. It is the most effective method that protects against acquiring and transmitting HIV and other STIs.

Other contraceptive options for dual protection

Hormonal contraceptives

- Oral contraceptive pills
- Injectables (Depo-Provera/ DMPA)
- Implants (Norplant, Jadelle, Implanon)

Hormonal methods are very appropriate for HIV positive women because they are effective, easy to use, suitable for short- or long-term use, and are reversible.

Emergency Contraceptive Pills

- HIV positive women can take emergency contraceptive pills to avoid unintended pregnancy. But women on anti-retroviral therapy need to consult their doctor.

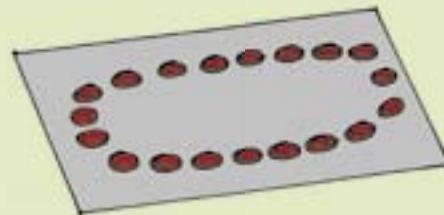
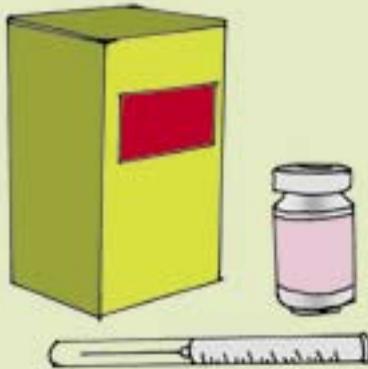
Intrauterine devices (IUDs)

- IUDs like Copper-T are highly effective, long-term and reversible method. It is attractive for HIV positive women who want reliable pregnancy protection.

Female and male sterilisation

- Female and male sterilisation provides no protection against acquiring STI or transmitting HIV.
- Women need to remember the importance of condoms in preventing STIs and HIV, since sterilisation is often associated with decrease in condom use.

Except for the use of condoms, all the other contraceptive options for dual protection should only be adopted after consultation with a qualified healthcare provider or medical practitioner.





Comparing Family Planning Methods

HIV positive people need to be aware of the effectiveness of the different family planning methods.

Condoms: effective, but must be used every time during sex.

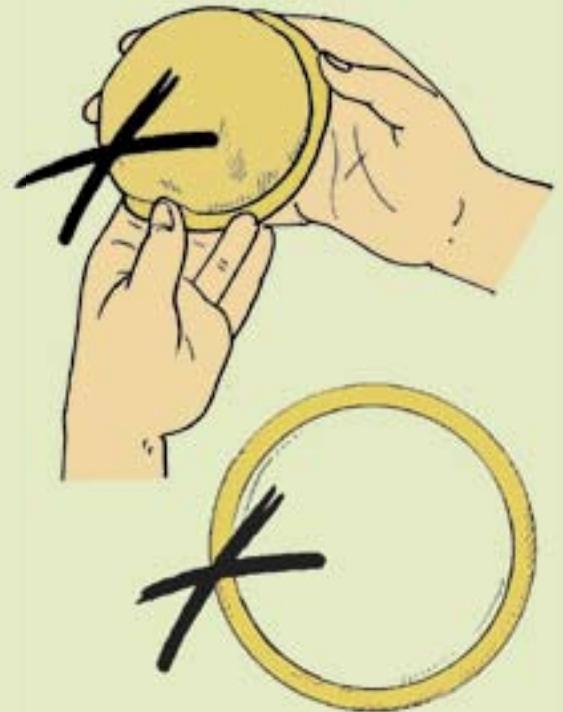
Oral pills/ injectables: very effective, but to be used as directed by qualified medical practitioner.

IUDs: to be used with caution and only on the advice of a qualified medical practitioner.

Female sterilisation & vasectomy / implants: most effective and easy to use.

Spermicides/ diaphragm: should not be used.

Women living with HIV should be referred to the nearest family planning centres for family planning services.





Pregnancy Counselling for Women Living with HIV/AIDS

Women living with HIV/AIDS need to know about the risks of pregnancy to their own health as well as the risks of transmission of HIV to their infant to take an informed decision about pregnancy.

Counselling about pregnancy among women living with HIV/AIDS

- Pregnancy does not accelerate the replication of the virus in HIV positive women.
- HIV positive couples should continue to use condoms to prevent infection with another strain of the virus or STIs.
- Unprotected sex by pregnant HIV positive women can increase the risk of HIV transmission to infants.

Pregnant women living with HIV/AIDS need to be informed that:

- Pregnancy can imply additional risks for their own health and the infant's health.
- There is risk of HIV transmission to the child during pregnancy, delivery and breastfeeding.
- Anti-retroviral therapy helps to reduce HIV transmission risks during childbirth and immediately postpartum.
- If the woman is on ARV therapy, the regimen may need to be altered prior to trying to achieve pregnancy.

Other concerns about fertility among HIV positive couples

Factors that affect the ability of HIV positive women to get pregnant

- Reduced fertility levels due to HIV infection
- Decreased sexual desire and activity
- Problem of STI infection such as pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) is common among HIV positive women.

Factors that affect the fertility of HIV positive men

- Advanced HIV-infection reduces sperm motility and total sperm count but anti-retroviral drugs can improve semen quality.



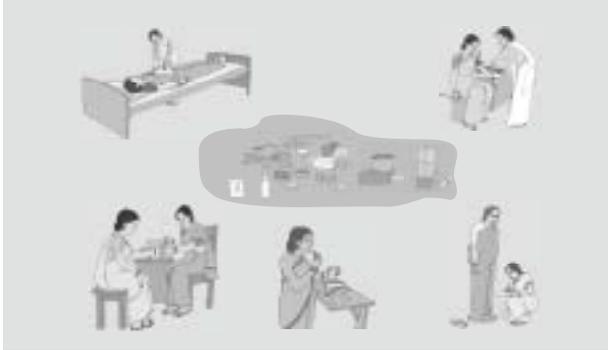


Safe Abortion Services for HIV Positive Women

HIV positive women may have an unwanted pregnancy due to contraceptive failure or non-usage of contraceptives. In such cases, proper referral has to be advised. The termination of pregnancy up to three months (12 weeks) is safe and is legal. The termination has to be conducted by a trained healthcare provider or a qualified medical practitioner. The termination of pregnancy can be done by taking medicines or by a surgical procedure.

Preventing unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions are essential for improving the reproductive health of women living with HIV.





Preventing HIV Transmission to Infants

Women living with HIV/AIDS need skilled care and support during pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum periods. The predominant fear among them and their families is of infecting the child with HIV. Therefore, as soon as an HIV positive woman comes to know of her pregnancy, she should be referred to PPTCT centre.

Skilled care during pregnancy

- Pregnant women living with HIV/AIDS need regular monitoring and medical support to reduce the risks of intrauterine growth restrictions, pre-term delivery and low birth weight as well as for anti-retroviral therapy.
- They require additional antenatal care to assess HIV-related signs and symptoms and increased risks of infections like malaria.
- They also have an increased risk of developing severe anaemia and therefore require additional precautions.

- Pregnant women living with HIV/AIDS are also at a greater risk of malnutrition due to reductions in dietary intake, nutrient malabsorption, increased energy requirements, etc., due to the HIV infection.
- To reduce the risk of transmission of STIs like syphilis to the child, all pregnant women require syphilis screening at the confirmation of pregnancy.
- Repeat screening in third trimester or around childbirth should be considered to detect syphilis infection acquired during pregnancy.
- Genital herpes, bacterial vaginosis and trichomoniasis are other complications that can also occur during pregnancy, which can cause pre-labour rupture of membranes, pre-term labour and low birth weight.

Nutritional counselling for HIV positive women during pregnancy

- Emphasis on an adequate diet to support pregnancy, which includes whole cereals and grains such as bajra, wheat, ragi; green vegetables rich in iron like spinach, cholei, amaranth; fruits rich in Vitamin C such as guava, amla, orange, etc.; milk and milk products, eggs; fish and chicken, etc.
- Regular nutrition and dietary assessment, including measuring of body weight and haemoglobin.
- Ensure intake of iron and folic acid tablets, and iodised salt.
- Ensure intake of only boiled and filtered water.





Skilled Care During Childbirth

Women living with HIV/AIDS need skilled care and support during labour or delivery. These include:

- Emotional support during childbirth.
- Whenever possible, women should be allowed to have a companion of their choice present during this time.
- Avoiding separation of HIV positive women from other women during childbirth.

Where to deliver

- HIV positive women need to have an institutional delivery, to ensure that all interventions for preventing parent to child transmission of HIV during labour and postpartum period are followed. Provision of medicines like “Nevirapine” prevents HIV transmission to the newborn.

Precautions during childbirth

- The membranes should be left intact as long as possible.
- Episiotomy may increase the possibility of HIV transmission to the child.

Mode of delivery

- Vaginal delivery has higher risk of HIV transmission to the child than elective caesarean section delivery. However, this benefit must be balanced against the risk of the surgical procedure.
- Women living with HIV/AIDS have increased risks of postoperative morbidity following caesarean section, especially infective complications.





Skilled Care During Postpartum Period

Comprehensive postpartum follow-up and care for women living with HIV/AIDS and the newborn has many important components.

- It should extend beyond the traditional six-week postpartum period to increase access to additional care and treatment required for HIV.
- Children born to HIV positive women have specific follow-up and care needs, in addition to routine care and immunisations.
- Postpartum care for HIV positive women includes assessment of maternal healing and infection complications, which are common among HIV positive women.
- Counselling on effective postpartum contraceptive methods, as well as condom promotion and provision.
- Information that ovulation can start as soon as four weeks for women who choose not to breastfeed.

- Women who choose not to breastfeed have a shorter duration of amenorrhoea and may require protection from an unplanned pregnancy soon after delivery.

Reducing risks of HIV transmission to the newborn during breastfeeding

- Breastfeeding increases the risk of HIV transmission to the child as it mostly occurs early in the breastfeeding period, but the newborn is exposed to HIV as long as breastfeeding continues.
- HIV positive women need infant-feeding counselling and support.
- Breastfeeding should be avoided when replacement feeding is acceptable, feasible, affordable and safe. Otherwise exclusive breastfeeding is recommended during the first six months.
- Nipple-fissure (especially if the nipple is bleeding), mastitis, or breast abscess may increase the risk of mother-to-child transmission during breastfeeding.
- Mouth sores in the newborns' mouth or thrush makes it easier for the virus to get transmitted to the baby.





How Women Living with HIV/AIDS Can Play a Proactive Role in HIV Prevention

Women can play a proactive role in building awareness and knowledge on HIV by learning to protect themselves, sharing information, dispelling myths, tackling stigma in their families as well as the larger community. For this women must:

- Learn about safe sexual practices and HIV/AIDS.
- Not let pressure from spouse or family force them into unwanted and unsafe sexual practices; unwanted pregnancies; and forced abortions.
- Not feel shy to talk about doubts and fears as well as their HIV status. Discuss all sexual and reproductive health concerns with medical practitioners.
- Ensure regular health monitoring.
- Remember that if suffering from a STI (ulcers and discharge from the genitals), the possibility of getting or transmitting HIV infection is very high. It is extremely important to get prompt and complete treatment for any STI.
- Always refer their sexual partner suffering from any STI symptoms for complete treatment





Positive Living with HIV

People living with HIV/AIDS need to adopt healthy lifestyles

- Eating healthy
- Exercising regularly like yoga and meditation
- Avoiding stress and fatigue
- Reducing alcohol and tobacco intake
- Avoiding all sources of infection
- Taking regular health-check-ups
- Seeking treatment for even any small ailment immediately, including early treatment for STIs
- Adhering to the prescribed anti-retroviral therapy and medicines
- Ensuring access to care, support and treatment

Preventing HIV transmission to others

- Disclosing HIV status to sexual partner
- Always using condoms in any form of sexual practice
- Not donating blood, plasma, semen, body organs, or other tissue

Specific precautions for HIV positive women

- Regular gynaecological examination
- Planning pregnancy carefully
- Seeking support from friends and family during distress or depressions, and consider professional counselling, if required



International HIV/AIDS Alliance was established in 1993 as a global partnership of people, organisations and communities working towards a shared vision that supports effective and integrated community responses to HIV/AIDS. This approach is based on the belief that those at the frontline of the struggle against HIV/AIDS must have resources to take on the challenges that the epidemic presents.

The India HIV/AIDS Alliance (Alliance India) was established in 1999 as part of the International HIV/AIDS Alliance with a strategic goal to increase community action for and access to HIV/AIDS prevention, and care and impact mitigation efforts in India. This is achieved through improving coverage of effective community focused AIDS efforts; strengthening leadership and capacity of civil society to respond to AIDS; and improving institutional, organisational and policy environments for community responses to HIV/AIDS.

Alliance India currently provides programmatic, technical, strategic, organisational development and financial support, guided by a commonly agreed strategic framework to four lead partners and one state partner in Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Manipur. In turn these partners provide similar support to more than 70 implementing NGOs/CBOs.

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