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## **I am over 50. Does HIV affect me?**



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Yes! HIV affects people of all ages. You, your spouse or your sex partner(s) could have HIV infection or be at risk for infection.

### **How many older adults are HIV-positive?**

Between 1985 and 2000, close to 3,500 people 50 years of age and older tested positive for HIV infection in Canada. Another estimated 15,000 people in Canada are HIV-positive and don't know it because they have not been tested. If you don't know you are HIV positive, you aren't getting the treatments that delay the development of AIDS, and you could also be putting your sexual partner(s) at risk for HIV infection.

### **Am I too old to be HIV positive or at risk for HIV?**

No, viruses don't pay attention to age—no one is ever too old to become infected with HIV. HIV is not just a young person's infection. Anyone can become infected with HIV by:

- having unprotected sex with someone who is HIV positive or whose HIV status you do not know
- sharing needles or syringes to inject drugs/medications/steroids/vitamins, or when having acupuncture, skin piercing or tattoos
- having a blood transfusion or organ transplant (this risk is now almost non-existent because, since 1985, blood products are screened for HIV).

Older women may be at an increased risk of HIV infection because they may have thinner vaginal walls and less vaginal lubrication. Sexual intercourse is likely to cause small cuts or tears, which can be a way for HIV to get into their blood system.

## **Wouldn't my doctor know if I or my partner was HIV-positive?**

Not necessarily. Many people believe that older people don't have sex. This is not the case—many older adults continue to be sexually active. Doctors and other care providers who assume that older adults are not sexually active or are unaware of an older adult's needle use may fail to recognize symptoms of HIV, or may believe that the symptoms are just signs of aging.

## **Is treatment effective for older adults?**

Yes. Although there is no cure for HIV, there are HIV treatments that slow down the progress of HIV and fight the infections that cause AIDS.

## **How can I protect myself and others from HIV infection?**

- Use safer sex practices every time you have sex (see Question 11 “How do I have sex more safely?”).
- Don't share needles or syringes. If new needles or syringes are not available, you can clean them with bleach and water by rinsing them twice with bleach, leaving the bleach in the needle for 30 seconds at a time, then rinsing them twice with clean water. **(Remember that bleach does not kill hepatitis C.)**
- Learn as much as you can about HIV.
- When you have symptoms that could be related to HIV, don't allow yourself or your doctor or health care provider to overlook the possibility of HIV infection—consider getting tested (see Question 23 “How do I get tested for HIV?”).

***For more information, contact your local AIDS service organization or health care practitioner.***

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For more copies of this fact sheet or other documents on HIV/AIDS, contact the Canadian HIV/AIDS Clearinghouse, 400-1565 Carling Avenue, Ottawa, ON K1Z 8R1  
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