

# Is Your Drinking Putting You at Risk?



ALCOHOL AND HIV/AIDS

## Alcohol and HIV

The virus that causes AIDS is called HIV. It is mainly passed on by sexual contact, especially by sexual intercourse (anal or vaginal).

When people have been drinking alcohol or using illicit drugs, they are more likely to have 'high risk' sex, i.e. unprotected anal or vaginal sex. This can increase the risk of getting the virus (HIV).

Prolonged heavy drinking weakens a person's ability to fight off illnesses because the immune system is damaged. The virus that causes AIDS also damages the immune system. The links between long term heavy drinking and HIV/AIDS are still not fully understood.

Alcohol use has been found to increase in people who have HIV/AIDS or who are worried that they may be at risk. Advice and information about sensible drinking may be needed or more in-depth help if a serious drinking problem exists.

**Remember:** alcohol is a disinhibiting drug. You are more likely to take a risk when you have been drinking.

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*“We met at a party, we'd both been drinking and one thing led to another. I'd heard about AIDS and all that but thought 'It won't happen to me'...but now it has”.*

## What you need to know about HIV and AIDS

AIDS is not a single illness but a group of infections and cancers which take hold because a person's immune system (which fights off illnesses) is damaged. AIDS is caused by a virus called HIV (Human Immuno-deficiency Virus).

## How do you get the Virus?

The virus is found in body fluids such as blood, semen and vaginal secretions. It can be passed on from an infected person:

- by sexual contact, especially by sexual intercourse (anal or vaginal).
- by sharing needles and syringes.
- a pregnant woman can pass the infection to her baby.

## HIV can't be spread by:

- everyday social contact.
- sharing things used by an infected person  
e.g. cups, cutlery, food, clothes, toilet seats, etc.
- coughing or sneezing.

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*“I had so much to drink I could hardly think straight never mind about 'safer sex'... now I'm really worried.”*

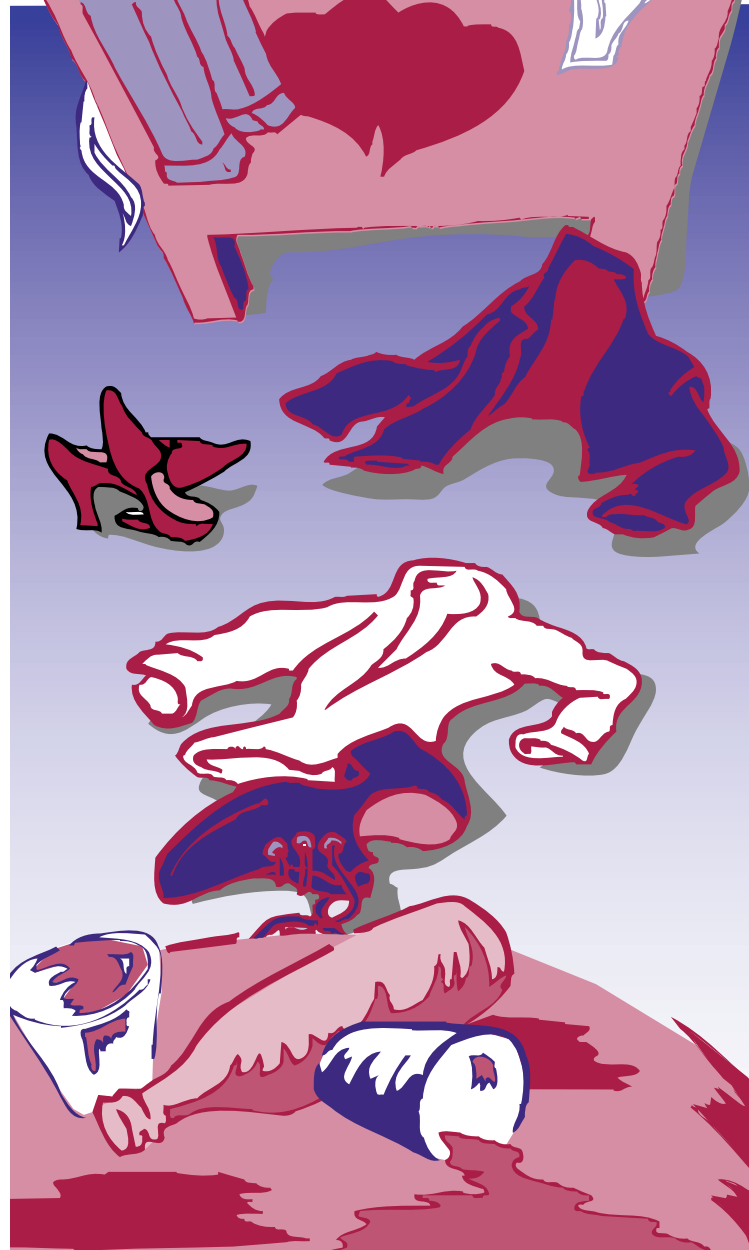
## How can the risk of infection be reduced?

There is no cure for HIV or AIDS but you can reduce the risk of infection by:

- using safer sexual practices ('safer sex'). Always use a condom during casual sex or with partners whose backgrounds are not known to you.
- never share needles or syringes.

## REMEMBER

People with HIV infection may not know they are carrying the virus. They may appear and feel well but are still infectious. It can be many years before an infected person shows signs of illness.



If you have concerns about alcohol and HIV/AIDS confidential advice, information and counselling are available from:

**apas**

**alcoline 0115 941 4747**

9.00am until 7.00pm Monday through to Friday  
Saturdays 9.00am to 1.00pm

Lo-call 0845 762 6316  
Minicom: 0115 948 5555  
email: [apas@apas.org.uk](mailto:apas@apas.org.uk)  
[www.apas.org.uk](http://www.apas.org.uk)

**apasDirect** a 'walk-in' service at  
36 Park Row Nottingham NG1 6GR

National AIDS Helpline  
Freephone Service  
available 24 hours  
Tel: (0800) 567123

Registered Charity Number:1070109  
Registered in England & Wales No: 3552901

HIV and AIDS is everyone's concern  
***Don't be complacent***  
***Don't ignore the risk***

*"Since AIDS has come along I'm much more careful about who I go with and why and I don't let booze cloud my judgement like I used to."*