

# THE PULSE

EnRICHing the lives of individuals we serve and keeping a pulse on healthcare integration at RBHA



According to AIDS.gov, more than one million Americans are living with HIV, but **one in five are not aware they are living with HIV**. HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. It is the virus that can lead to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome or AIDS if not treated. Unlike some other viruses, the human body can't get rid of HIV completely, even with treatment. **So once someone contracts HIV, they have it for life**. HIV can be transmitted through sexual contact, sharing needles to inject drugs, and/or pregnancy or breastfeeding.

HIV attacks the body's immune system, specifically the T cells, which help the immune system fight off infections. Untreated, HIV reduces the number of T cells in the body, making the person more likely to get other infections or infection-related cancers. **Over time, HIV can destroy so many of these cells that the body can't fight off infections and disease**. These infections plus an already weakened immune system, signal that the person has AIDS, the last stage of HIV infection. Someone with AIDS may develop a wide range of other health conditions. **No effective cure currently exists for HIV/AIDS, but with proper medical care, HIV can be controlled**. If taken the right way, the medicine used to treat HIV can dramatically prolong the lives of a person infected with HIV and greatly lower their chance of infecting others.

**The only way to know for sure whether or not you have contracted HIV is to get tested**. Knowing one's status is important because it helps with making healthy decisions to prevent getting or transmitting HIV. Some people may experience a flu-like illness within 2 to 4 weeks after infection, however some people may not feel sick during this stage. Flu-like symptoms include fever, chills, rash, night sweats, muscle aches, sore throat, fatigue, swollen lymph nodes, or mouth ulcers. These symptoms can last anywhere from a few days to several weeks. If you have these symptoms, that doesn't mean you have HIV; however, if you have these symptoms after a potential exposure to HIV, see a health care provider. **After getting tested, it's important to find out the result of your test so you can talk to your health care provider about treatment options if you're HIV-positive or learn ways to prevent getting HIV if you're HIV-negative**.

For more information visit the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/default.html>.

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# Injection Drug Use and HIV Risk



Sharing needles, syringes, or other drug injection equipment (for example, cookers) puts people at risk for getting or transmitting HIV and other infections.



About 1 in 10 new HIV diagnoses in the United States are attributed to injection drug use or male-to-male sexual contact *and* injection drug use.\*

## Risk of HIV

The risk for getting or transmitting HIV is very high if an HIV-negative person uses injection equipment that someone with HIV has used. This is because the needles, syringes, or other injection equipment may have blood in them, and blood can carry HIV.

**1/160**

An HIV-negative person has a 1 in 160 chance of getting HIV every time they use a needle that has been used by someone with HIV.

**#2**

Sharing syringes is the second-riskiest behavior for getting HIV. Receptive anal sex is the riskiest.

Substance use disorder can also increase the risk of getting HIV through sex. When people are under the influence of substances, they are more likely to have risky anal or vaginal sex, such as having sex without protection (like a condom or medicine to prevent or treat HIV), having sex with multiple partners, or trading sex for money or drugs.

## Risk of Other Infections and Overdose

Sharing needles, syringes, or other injection equipment also puts people at risk for getting viral hepatitis. People who inject drugs (PWID) should talk to a doctor about getting a blood test for hepatitis B and C and getting vaccinated for hepatitis A and B.

In addition to being at risk for HIV and viral hepatitis, PWID can have other serious health problems, like skin infections and heart infections. People can also overdose or even die from having too many drugs or too much of one drug in their body or from products that may be mixed with the drugs without their knowledge (for example, fentanyl).

\* Men who report both risk factors.

# Holiday Survival Guide



A few tips for maintaining your mental health during the holidays!

## Self-care

Pay special attention to your eating, sleeping, & downtime.

## Fun, not perfection

Just have as much fun as you can & don't expect the holidays to be perfect.

## Anticipate stress

Plan ahead of time what your strategy will be when times get stressful.

## Coping with Stress During the Holidays

- Keep expectations manageable.
- Be realistic about what you can & cannot do.
- Leave the past in the past & look toward the future.
- Do something for someone else.
- Enjoy outdoor activities, like taking a walk.
- Be aware of excessive drinking.
- Spend time with supportive & caring people.
- Save time for yourself!

Columbia River  
Mental Health Services

**If you or someone you know is in **crisis** please call any of the following numbers:**

RBHA Crisis Services

(804) 819-4100

Available 24/7

AliveRVA

1-833-4PEERVA (1-833-473-3782)

Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-8255





**Wishing you the Happiest of Holidays  
and a Bright, Shiny New Year from the  
RICH Recovery Clinic!!!**

