

**FACTSHEET #3: How HIV works in the body**

**YOUR KEY MESSAGE:**

*“If you look after your HIV health you can live a long and healthy life with HIV. Knowing how HIV works in your body can help you make the right choices for your health and wellbeing.”*

**WHAT TO ASK ABOUT HIV IN THE BODY**

Asking questions about previous experiences of HIV helps to check a client’s assumptions and misunderstand and to correct them if needed.

- What do you know about HIV?
- Do you know anyone else living with HIV?
- Have you ever known a person with HIV?

**WHAT TO SAY ABOUT HIV IN THE BODY**

- **The immune system** protects you from illness.
- **HIV is a virus** that damages the human immune system. Being told that you have HIV means that you have HIV in your body.
- **HIV destroys immune cells** called CD4 cells.
- HIV has the ‘key to the lock’ of CD4 cells.
- HIV turns CD4 cells in to ‘**virus making factories**’.
- **HIV reproduces inside CD4 cells** and releases more HIV in to the blood stream.
- **CD4 cells die** and over time this weakens the immune system.
- HIV treatment prevents HIV destroying CD4s.

**WHAT TO SAY ABOUT HIV AND AIDS**

**HIV is a virus and can be transmitted between people.** HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus.

**AIDS is a syndrome caused by HIV** and cannot be transmitted between people. AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

**HIV and AIDS are not the same thing.**

**AIDS is a series of symptoms and illnesses** that appear because the immune system cannot protect the body from illness.

**If you don’t maintain your HIV health** then it will damage your immune system. If you do take care of your HIV health then **you can have good health and live a long life.**

When HIV is left untreated the body experiences illnesses called ‘**opportunistic infections**’. This is because they take the *opportunity* of a weakened immune system to take hold in the body.

**Opportunistic infections are treatable** and preventable with drug treatment.

**HELPFUL SERVICE HINTS**

Be positive and optimistic – there is lots of good news about HIV. It’s important to keep saying that “now you know you have HIV you can live a long and healthy life.”

## Diagram Aid for How HIV Works in the Body

The diagram below highlights the seven important points to make about how HIV works in the body. This diagram can be projected on to a screen and used to facilitate this session or facilitators can refer to the diagram to ensure that they have covered all points on it.

