Sexually Transmitted Diseases/Infections

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) Infection

HIV infection represents a spectrum of disease that can begin with a brief acute retroviral syndrome that typically transitions to a multiyear chronic and clinically latent illness. Without treatment, this illness eventually progresses to a symptomatic, life-threatening immunodeficiency disease known as AIDS. HIV damages a person's body by destroying specific blood cells, called CD4+ T cells, which are crucial to helping the body fight diseases.

HIV is spread primarily by unprotected sex or by sharing needles, syringes, or other equipment used to inject illicit drugs. HIV can also be passed from an infected mother to her infant during pregnancy, birth, or breast-feeding.

Many people who are infected with HIV do not have any symptoms at all for 10 years or more. The only way to know if a person is infected is to test them for HIV infection. Reactive screening tests must be confirmed by a supplemental antibody test. (i.e., Western blot [WB] and indirect immunofluorescence assay [IFA]) or virologic test (i.e., the HIV-1 RNA assay). A confirmed positive antibody test result indicates that a person is infected with HIV and capable of transmitting the virus to others. HIV antibody is detectable in at least 95 percent of patients within three months after infection.

All lab confirmed cases of HIV require follow-up and case investigation by Disease Intervention Specialists (DIS). Follow-up must also include partner notification activities.

For more information:

- CDC HIV/AIDS Basics (Q&A), www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/qa/definitions.htm
- CDC STD Treatment Guidelines 2010 – HIV Infection: Detection, Counseling, and Referral, www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/2010/hiv.htm