

# Health Care

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ROBERT H. CRANFIELD D.C.

## Thinking of having a baby? Get a HIV test

There is a lot to think about when you want to have a baby or when a baby is on the way. Learning about HIV is an important step.

The Ministry of Health and Long Term Care recommends that all women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy should talk to their doctor about HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) testing as part of their routine care before or during pregnancy. The HIV test gives moms-to-be information they need to stay healthy and protect their infant.

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). It is spread through body fluids such as blood, semen, vaginal fluids and breast milk.

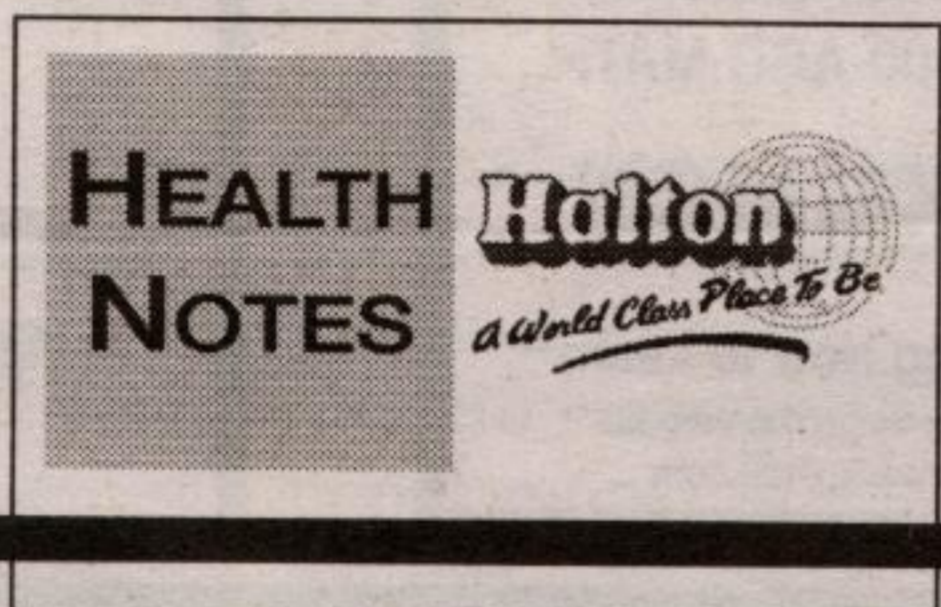
Anyone can get HIV by having unprotected sex or sharing needles with someone who is infected. The virus can also pass from a mother to her infant during pregnancy, delivery or breastfeeding.

Many women who have HIV are infected through unprotected heterosexual intercourse. Many do not even

know they have the virus until they become ill or have a child who is diagnosed with HIV.

Women are at risk of having HIV if they:

- Have unprotected sex with an infected person
- Have unprotected sex with someone who has used injection drugs
- Share needles to inject



drugs or other substances

- Are from parts of the world where the rate of HIV is high and the main risk factor is from unprotected heterosexual intercourse

- Had a blood transfusion before 1985

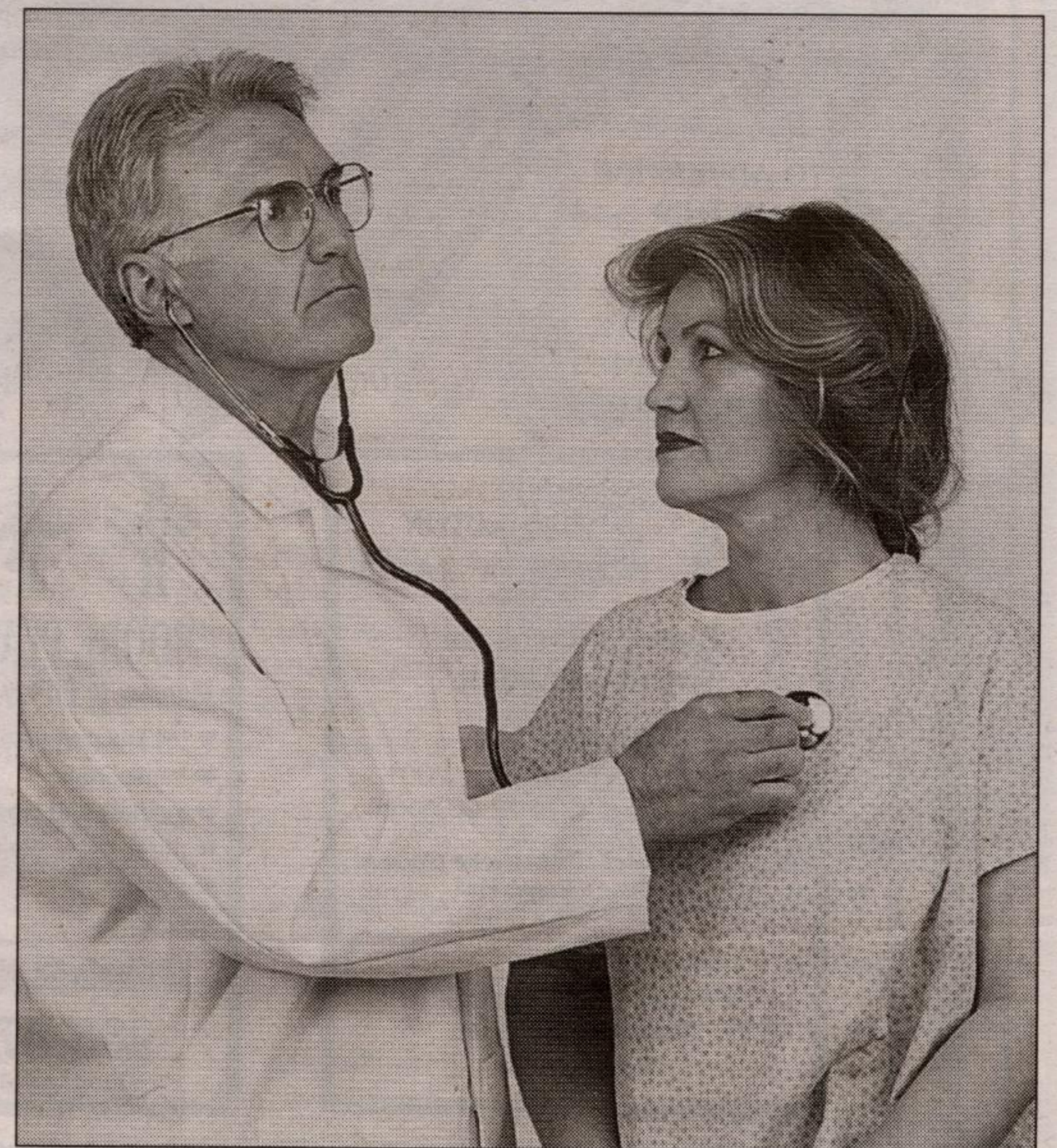
Most women with HIV do not pass the virus on to their babies, however, the chance is about 15 to 30 per cent that the virus will pass from mother to baby before or during birth.

By knowing if she has HIV, it can help a woman decide how to protect her baby. It also helps to get the treatment and support to stay healthy.

A woman discovering she has HIV can get complete information on choices about birth control, having babies, or taking medicine to lower the risk of passing the virus to the baby. In fact, with treatment, the risk of infecting a baby is lowered to only five to eight per cent. When a mom with HIV does not receive treatment there is a 15 to 30 per cent chance of passing the infection to the baby.

The HIV antibody test is very accurate and will not be done unless the mom-to-be gives her consent. She can choose to be tested for HIV before pregnancy at the same time a health care provider takes blood for other pregnancy tests or she can wait and be tested later. It takes about two weeks to get the results.

If a person does not want to give their name for a HIV test, they can choose to be tested at one of Ontario's 33 anonymous



test sites. Call the Halton Region Health Department for the closest site.

If a person's test is negative, they likely do not have HIV. However, if they have been recently exposed to the virus (for example, had unprotected sex or shared needles), they may not have been infected long enough for the virus to show up in their blood. To be sure, a person should be tested again in three months from the

last time they've had unprotected sex or shared a needle.

For more information call the Halton Region Health Department, 1-905-825-6065 for HIV and AIDS information or 1-905-693-4242 for pregnancy and parenting information or call toll free, 1-866-442-5866 or visit Halton Region's Web site: [www.region.halton.on.ca/health](http://www.region.halton.on.ca/health)

Health Notes is a monthly column prepared by Halton Region Health Department staff.

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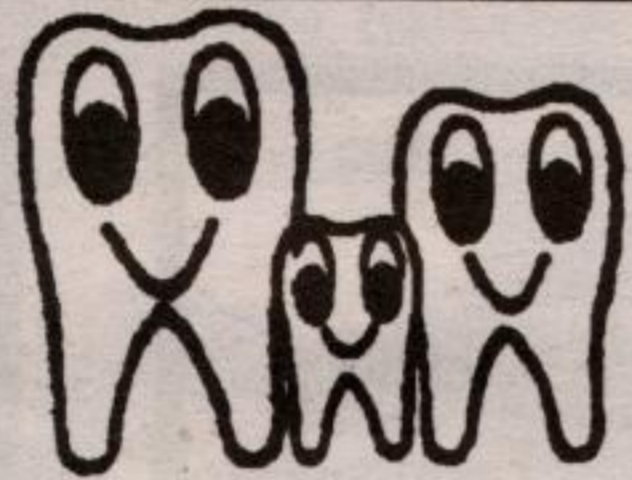
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