

Infections of the Mouth and Throat

Oral candidiasis (thrush)

What is it?

Candidiasis is an infection caused by a fungus. This fungus is found in just about everyone's body. A healthy immune system keeps it under control. Candidiasis is a very common OI in people whose immune systems have been damaged by HIV. It can infect the mouth and the throat.

In the mouth, the infection is called thrush. It looks like white patches similar to cottage cheese, or red spots. It can cause a sore throat, pain when swallowing, nausea, and loss of appetite. The infection can spread deeper into the throat. When this happens, it is called esophagitis.

How is it treated?

If the infection is only in the mouth or the top section of the throat, your doctor can give you lozenges (nystatin) to suck on and swish around your mouth. You should not crush the lozenges with your teeth or swallow them whole. You should suck on them until they completely dissolve. You will need to do this four times a day for 10 days. Instead of lozenges, your doctor can give you a liquid to be swished around the mouth and swallowed four times a day. If, after two weeks, the nystatin lozenges or liquid don't appear to be working, your doctor can give you another type of lozenge (amphotericin B) or a gel (miconazole) to apply to the patches in your mouth.

If the infection has spread deeper into the throat, the drug fluconazole should be used. Fluconazole is a pill that needs to be swallowed once a day for up to two weeks. This medicine should be available in all clinics and hospitals. If your clinic or hospital refuses to give it to you when you need it, or does not have stock of it, please contact the Treatment Action Campaign.

Are there other infections of the mouth?

Other mouth-related problems to watch for include aphthous ulcers (usually treated with a topical cream), oral hairy leukoplakia (no treatment usually required; acyclovir pills can be used for severe cases), and gum disease. Oral warts, caused by the human papillomavirus, can be removed by a medical specialist (a dermatologist) using a liquid applied directly to the wart or by surgery.

Infections Causing Diarrhoea

In Southern Africa, almost all people with AIDS develop diarrhoea at some time in the course of their disease. Severe or prolonged diarrhoea can lead to weight loss and malnutrition. The excessive loss of fluid (dehydration) that may occur with AIDS-related diarrhoea can be life threatening.

What is diarrhoea, exactly?

Diarrhoea, which means two or more loose or unformed stools per day, can last for a few days or can be chronic, lasting for weeks or months. Many people with AIDS have diarrhoea that persists for more than a month, or is so severe that they expel several gallons of fluid a day. The diarrhoea may be accompanied by abdominal