

AIDS & YOU

Separating fact from fiction about the disease and how it affects you.

WHAT DOES AIDS MEAN TO YOU?



AIDS stands for acquired immunodeficiency syndrome. It is a disease caused by a virus that can destroy the body's ability to fight off illness. The AIDS virus makes you unable to fight other diseases that invade your body. These diseases can kill you. There is presently no cure for AIDS.

Many people feel that the AIDS virus infects only certain "high risk groups". This is untrue. Who you are has nothing to do with whether you are in danger of being infected with the AIDS virus. What matters is what you do.

Regardless of what you may have heard, the AIDS virus is easily avoided. You can't get it through casual contact in school, the workplace, at parties, in residence facilities and resident camps, childcare centers or stores. You won't get it by going swimming in a pool where a person with AIDS or one who has been infected by the AIDS virus, has been swimming.

You also won't get it from the towels in a locker room or the shower, or the whirlpool, or by using exercise equipment. It won't be passed through a glass or by eating utensils. Nor do you have to worry about shaking hands, hugging, or being in a crowded elevator with a person who is infected with the virus.

No one has ever gotten the AIDS virus from a mosquito or any other insect bite, or from a toilet seat, urine, excrement, sweat, saliva or even from a kiss.

There are actually very few ways you can be infected by the AIDS virus. It is transmitted through semen, vaginal secretions and blood. Therefore, you can become infected by having sex with an infected person, or by using drugs and sharing a needle and syringe.

Babies of women who have been infected with the AIDS virus may be born with the infection because it can be transmitted from the mother's blood to the baby before or during birth.

WHAT ABOUT GIVING AND RECEIVING BLOOD?

1. **GIVING BLOOD.** You are not now, nor have you ever been in danger of getting AIDS from giving blood at a blood bank. The needles that are used for donations are brand new. Once they are used they are destroyed. There is no way you can come into contact with the AIDS virus by donating blood.

2. **RECEIVING BLOOD.** Some people were infected with the AIDS virus by getting blood transfusions prior to 1985, before the virus was identified. Today, all donated blood in the U.S. is tested to make it as safe as possible for those who need it. Call your local blood bank if you have any questions.

CAN ANYONE BE INFECTED WITH THE AIDS VIRUS?

YES. The homosexual population was the first to be affected by the disease in this country. But no matter what you've heard or read the number of heterosexual cases is growing.

The people who have died of AIDS in this country have been male and female, rich and poor, white, black, Hispanic, Asian and American Indian.

IT'S NOT EASY TO BE INFECTED WITH THE AIDS VIRUS

The AIDS virus can only be transmitted in certain ways. You cannot get the disease from the pool, locker room. Exercise equipment, or from any kind of casual, everyday contact. You may become infected if you:

- ◆ Have sex with someone infected with the AIDS virus.
- ◆ Use a needle and syringe that have previously been used by someone with the AIDS virus.
- ◆ Are born to a woman infected with the AIDS virus.

HOW DO YOU AVOID AIDS?

Keeping yourself safe from AIDS is relatively easy. You have to avoid sex with anyone who is infected with the virus, and never share needles and syringes.

There is no way to tell if someone is infected with the virus without a blood test. If you have sex with someone infected with the virus, you are at risk of becoming infected.

Condoms with a spermicide are the best means now available for preventing sexual transmission for those who do not practice abstinence and have not formed a mutually faithful, monogamous relationship with an uninfected partner.

If you are giving first aid to someone who is bleeding, you may want to wear rubber gloves, if they are available, to avoid direct contact with blood. If blood does get on your skin, simply wash it off with soap and water.

WHAT IF YOU THINK YOU MIGHT HAVE THE AIDS VIRUS?



You have probably heard about the "AIDS Test." The test doesn't actually tell you if you have the AIDS. It shows if you have been infected with the virus. The test looks for changes in the blood that occur after you have been infected with the virus.

The Public Health Service recommends that you should be counseled and tested if, since 1978, you have had any sexually transmitted disease or have shared needles for injecting drugs; if you are a man who has had sex with another man; or if you have had sex with a prostitute, male or female. You should also be tested if you have had sex with anyone who has done any of these things.

If you are a woman who has been engaging in risky behavior and you plan to have a baby or are not using birth control, you should be tested. Your doctor may advise you to be tested if you received a blood transfusion between 1978 and 1985.

There has been a great deal in the press about problems with the test. It is very reliable if it is performed by a good laboratory and the results are interpreted by a knowledgeable physician or counselor. It can also be done confidentially.

If you have been engaging in risky behavior, speak frankly to a doctor who understands the AIDS problem, or to an AIDS counselor.

WOULD YOU LIKE MORE INFORMATION?

If you would like to know more about AIDS, talk to your doctor, local health department or hospital. In addition, you can get helpful, confidential information from the National AIDS hotline at 1-800-342-AIDS (2437) / 24 hours a day. The Spanish hotline is 1-800-344-SIDA (7432). The hotline number for the hearing impaired is 1-900-AIDS-TTY.