

## **AIDS : the facts / National Union of Students and AVERT.**

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# AIDS

THE  
FACTS

## WHAT IS AIDS?

### AIDS stands for:

- Acquired – not born with
- Immune – body's defence system
- Deficiency – not working properly
- Syndrome – a group of signs and symptoms

AIDS is caused by a virus. If the virus gets into the bloodstream, it attacks certain parts of the body's immune system. Some illnesses that the body normally would fight off become problems.

## HOW DOES SOMEONE GET INFECTED WITH THE AIDS VIRUS?

There are **four ways** that a person can get infected:

- Having sex with someone who is infected with the AIDS virus (through blood, semen, vaginal secretions, urine, or faeces).
- Sharing intravenous (I.V.) needles with someone who is infected with the AIDS virus (because small amounts of blood are also shared).
- As a baby, being born to a woman infected with the AIDS virus.
- Receiving blood transfusions or blood products from someone infected with the AIDS virus. (Since 1985, when the blood banks adopted screening guidelines for the AIDS virus, this has not been a problem, but people who have already received blood still have a very slight risk because AIDS may take 5 years or longer to develop.)

## WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT GETTING OR SPREADING AIDS?

Unless you **KNOW** that a sex partner is not infected:

- Don't allow his/her blood (including menstrual blood) semen, urine, vaginal secretions, or faeces to enter your vagina, anus, or mouth.
- Use condoms (sheaths) for vaginal and anal sex. The AIDS virus cannot get through a condom if it properly used and does not break.
- The spermicide nonoxynol 9, in contraceptive foams, jellies, and creams, kills the virus on contact. Use it in addition to a condom.
- If you think you might be infected, **NEVER** allow your blood, semen, urine, vaginal secretions, or faeces to enter another person's body. Always use a condom for sex.

**Know your sex partners. Ask questions about past sexual history and drug use. Be honest about your own past. Never share I.V. needles.**

Most people who have got AIDS have been gay or bisexual men, I.V. drug users, or both. Haemophiliacs are also at high risk if they received blood products before 1985. Of the women who have got AIDS, some have been I.V. drug users. Others got it through sex with male partners. A small number got it from blood transfusions received before 1985. The number of infected heterosexuals of both sexes is now increasing rapidly.

### **CAN I FIND OUT IF I'VE BEEN INFECTED WITH THE AIDS VIRUS?**

You can get a blood test to see if you have antibodies (blood proteins which usually mean that your body is fighting an infection) to the AIDS virus. If you test positive, it does NOT mean that you have or will get AIDS. Antibody-positive people should assume they are contagious, but everyone whether you test positive or negative - should be careful.

### **DOES EVERYONE WHO IS INFECTED WITH THE AIDS VIRUS GET AIDS?**

**NO!** Most people infected with the AIDS virus have no symptoms and appear to be in good health.

Some people infected with the virus will get AIDS-Related Complex (ARC). The symptoms of ARC include swollen lymph glands, diarrhoea, severe fatigue, rapid weight loss, night sweats, fevers, chills, and infections. These symptoms happen because the immune

system has been damaged. They last for weeks or months. Some ARC illnesses are mild, but anyone with any of these symptoms should see a doctor.

A smaller group of people who have the virus will get AIDS. The symptoms of AIDS include the symptoms of ARC plus shortness of breath, dry cough, and pink or purple spots on the skin. These additional symptoms are caused either by a lung infection called pneumocystis carinii pneumonia (PCP), or a cancer called Kaposi's sarcoma (KS).

The symptoms of ARC and AIDS can also occur in many other illnesses.

Only a trained doctor can diagnose ARC or AIDS.

### **CAN I CATCH AIDS IN ANY OTHER WAY, LIKE I MIGHT CATCH A COLD?**

**NO!** You can't get AIDS from sharing food, telephones, buses, towels, toilets, pencils, or swimming pools. You can't get it from the air or from hugging.

**For further information contact your local STD clinic at:**

**or ring your local AIDS helpline on:**

# **NUS**

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