

AIDS : how drug users can avoid it / SCODA.

Contributors

SCODA

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AIDS.

***HOW DRUG USERS
CAN AVOID IT.***

WHY YOU RISK AIDS IF YOU'RE A DRUG USER.

AIDS isn't just spread by having sex, it's also spread by blood.

This means that any blood from an AIDS infected person that finds its way into your bloodstream could infect you and cause AIDS.

And, of course, it could find its way into your bloodstream if you're a drug user, by sharing a needle or works with someone already infected.

That person may not know they have been infected with the AIDS virus.

You can't see the virus and you can't tell if someone has been infected just by looking at them.

People who are infected may not even show signs of illness for a long time, but they can still infect you.

And they certainly don't have to be gay.

So anyone you share a needle or works with (even if only once) could be a carrier and they could infect you.

It makes sense, therefore, to do everything you can to avoid this deadly disease.

The safest way is not to inject drugs. The next best thing is not to share works with anyone. (This should avoid you being infected through drug use.)

Later in this leaflet you'll find some practical advice for your own protection.

First, though, what exactly is AIDS.

AIDS. THE FACTS NOT THE FICTION.

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

Although AIDS has probably been around for many years, it was first diagnosed in 1981 in New York and Los Angeles.

Since then, the disease has spread dramatically. It now affects many people around the world, particularly drug users who do or have injected drugs and shared needles or works.

There is no known effective treatment for AIDS. It can be deadly and is a very unpleasant way to die.

But at least its cause has been discovered. It is a virus, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) which prevents your body fighting off infections and illnesses by attacking the immune system which normally protects you. And gradually these illnesses and infections become more serious as your body gets weaker, usually leading to death.

Eventually the many research centres around the world working on AIDS hope to find a cure, or at least a vaccine.

But at the moment AIDS is still incurable and very deadly.

EVEN THOUGH IT'S FRIGHTENING, DON'T PANIC.

In recent years a number of sensationalist articles have been written about AIDS and how you can catch it.

You can be infected by HIV, the virus which causes AIDS, if you share needles and works or through sex. But there is no need for anyone to become infected.

You won't, as some people think, catch it by being near someone who is infected or who has AIDS.

Or by touching them. Or eating food prepared by them. Or sharing cutlery and crockery used by them. Or even living with them.

Indeed, AIDS is really a very difficult disease to catch if you just take a few simple precautions.

HOW TO AVOID AIDS.

We realise that giving up drugs may not be something you're prepared or able to do at the moment.

If you don't inject drugs, however, don't start. Because this way you can avoid AIDS.

If you do inject drugs, at least consider giving up injecting. This would immediately cut down the risk for you.

If you don't feel able to stop injecting at least keep your own needle and works, never share them with anyone else and never use anyone else's.

There is no doubt that sharing dirty works can and do spread AIDS.

So always make sure yours are clean and never share them.

This means only using your own set. And when you need to, get a new set from the chemist or, if there is one near you, from a local needle and syringe replacement scheme.

It may be hard to get your own set of works, but it is the best protection from infection.

Sometimes you may feel you have no choice but to use someone else's works. If there really is no other option, you can still reduce the chance of being infected by drawing clean cold water into the syringe then flushing it away – onto the ground, down a drain, into the sink – but not back into the water. Then do this again.

Adding washing up liquid to the cold water helps to get rid of dried blood. Use about as much as you would for washing up. Flush through twice with the soapy water and then flush the works twice with ordinary cold water to get rid of the washing up liquid.

Greater protection against infection can be achieved by going on to take the needle and syringe apart, putting them in a pan of water (removing any air bubbles), covering the pan and boiling the water for five minutes. Then wash the parts in clean water.

This can wash away a lot of the blood in the works. Do this every time straight after the works are used so that the blood doesn't dry and so you don't forget.

Make cleaning works part of your normal fixing routine.

Cleaning works won't completely avoid AIDS, but it will reduce the chance of being infected. For it to have any use, clean works between every fix. But remember, cleaning works may help protect you from HIV infection, but it won't kill Hepatitis B and some other infections which can be passed by sharing works.

And don't throw away your works where other people might find them and use them or get accidentally stabbed by the needle.

Using these methods, you can help protect both yourself and other people from infection.

SAFER SEX CAN ALSO PROTECT YOU.

The other main way you could be infected by HIV is through sex.

So we recommend that you follow some other precautions.

Whether you are gay or straight, you should seriously consider 'safer sex.'

This means using a sheath (condom) with a water based lubricant such as KY jelly to reduce the risk of any cum or genital fluids being exchanged between partners when you have vaginal, oral or anal sex.

Anyone with any chance of carrying the virus should also think very carefully before having children. Because the virus can be passed by pregnant women to their unborn children.

Having 'safer sex' isn't having 'funless sex.' If men use a sheath and at the same time women use contraception, sex is safer.

You can kiss, lick, stroke, fondle, mutually masturbate and find many ways to enjoy sex.

But avoid anything which breaks the skin and contact between cum or genital fluids and broken skin because this might allow the virus to reach the bloodstream.

And reducing the number of people you have sex with will make it less likely that you will be infected.

Since sex is the other way in which AIDS is usually spread, following our advice should help protect you from infection.

FINDING OUT IF YOU'VE BEEN INFECTED.

There is a test which can tell if you have been infected by HIV.

But don't decide to be tested without thinking about it very hard and you could find it helpful to talk it over with your local drugs service or with one of the services listed on the next page.

WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION, HELP OR ADVICE.

If you want more information, help or advice on being tested for HIV, on AIDS or on your drug problem, just contact one of the services below.

For help and advice on AIDS and testing for infection.

- 1. Ring: the National AIDS Help Lines on 0800 567123 for a free 24 hour confidential service***
- 2. or contact the Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Clinic (you'll find its address and phone number under 'Venereal Disease' in your local telephone directory).***
- 3. Or go to your local drug service.***

For help and advice on your drug habit.

- 1. See your doctor or look up your nearest drug service in the directory of drug services at the local Citizens Advice Bureau, the Samaritans or the Library.***
- 2. Or dial 100 and ask for Freephone Drug Problems to get the telephone number of a drug service in every county in England and numbers for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.***