

HIV? AIDS? : we're older people it's not our problem ... / The Positive Place, Age Concern Lewisham.

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HIV? AIDS?

ROBERT TAYLOR



**We're older people
It's not our problem!**

**"My first patient
was a married
woman in her mid
50s"**

HIV and AIDS consultant.



**AGE
Concern**

LEWISHAM

If you think HIV and AIDS only affects gay men and drug users, think again. Young or old, single or married, male or female, black or white, the HIV virus makes no distinction. Worldwide, the HIV virus is most commonly transmitted through intercourse with someone of the opposite sex.

WHAT IS THE HIV VIRUS ?

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. It is a virus spread through the blood supply, weakening the body's resistance to infections and illnesses. If HIV is in your body, you are said to be HIV Positive.

WHAT IS AIDS ?

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. It is a collection of specific illnesses and conditions that occur because the body's immune system has been damaged by the HIV virus.



HOW DO PEOPLE BECOME HIV POSITIVE?

- by unprotected sexual intercourse with someone who is already infected
- by sharing equipment with an injecting drug user who is already infected

Sex

Intercourse without a condom (French Letter, Durex or Rubber Johnnie) can lead to infection. During intercourse, semen or blood which is infected with the HIV virus can pass from one person to another through the lining of the vagina or anus, through cuts and scratches on the penis, lining of the mouth, gums or on the tongue.

Injecting Drug Use

Re-using needles or syringes can lead to the exchange of small quantities of blood. If one user is HIV positive, the infected blood can be passed on to another user.

HIV IS NOT PASSED ON BY

- kissing, touching or hugging someone who is HIV positive
- touching or sharing objects that have been used by a person with HIV
- sneezing or coughing
- tears or sweat
- insect bites
- toilet seats

DOES BEING HIV POSITIVE MEAN YOU HAVE AIDS ?

No. HIV is an unusual virus because a person can be infected with it for many years and yet appear to be perfectly healthy.

The virus gradually multiplies inside the body and eventually destroys its ability to fight off illness. However, it seems likely that many people with HIV will go on to have serious health problems, though this may not be for many years.

People who contract HIV are infected for life and can pass the virus on to others.

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HOW CAN YOU PROTECT YOURSELF?

- recognise that no matter what age or sex you or your partner are, HIV and AIDS concerns you.
- take some simple precautions

WHEN HAVING SEX

Always use a condom when having sex with someone new. If you need a lubricant always use one that is water based, like KY jelly. Never use oil based lubricants such as creams, lotions, baby oil or vaseline, as they weaken and damage the rubber, causing the condom to break.

Condoms and lubricants can be bought across the counter in any chemist. Using a condom does not mean penetration is completely safe but it does make it much safer than unprotected sex.

If you have oral sex, it is still advisable to use a condom. Flavoured ones are now available for this purpose

If you are in a long term relationship, but have sex with someone other than your partner, then using a condom during that other relationship is doubly important.

A condom will not only protect you, it will also mean you will reduce the risk of infection to your regular partner.

It is particularly important to remember these safeguards when you are relaxed - after a few drinks, away from home, on holiday or on business.

INJECTING DRUG USE

Always use your own equipment, mixing utensils and water. Never share with anybody and dispose of used needles and syringes safely by putting them in a rigid container.

HOW CAN YOU FIND OUT IF YOU ARE HIV POSITIVE?

When people have become infected by HIV, the body produces antibodies to the virus. The HIV test looks for these antibodies. It's always a good idea to talk to someone about whether you need to take an HIV test. The telephone advice services listed on the back page will help you in making this decision.

Your doctor can give you the test or you can go to a hospital VD clinic (now called a GUM clinic) If you want this to be kept private, go to a clinic, where you need not give your own name or address. You will also receive pre and post test counselling there.

WHAT DO THE RESULTS OF THIS TEST TELL YOU?

A negative test tells you that the antibodies to HIV have not been found. However, it can take three months or longer from the time of infection, for the antibodies to show up in the blood test. It is a

good idea to have a further test after six months.

A positive test means that antibodies to HIV have been found and infection is present. A positive test does not necessarily mean that you have AIDS. However, it does mean you can pass on the virus to other people even though

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you may look and feel perfectly well.

If you or your partner are HIV positive, you certainly don't need to give up sex. Just remember always to use a condom.

Alternatively you can have very good sex without penetration - kissing, cuddling and massage are perfectly safe, and there are no risks of HIV infection from mutual masturbation.

BY USING A CONDOM

You can reduce the risk of becoming infected with other sexually transmitted diseases such as Herpes, Chlamydia, Genital Warts and Thrush:

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Herpes A virus causing sores round the mouth and genitals, possibly a fever or sickness and an uncomfortable feeling when you pass water.

Chlamydia Inflammation of the vagina or urethra. Identified by burning, itching or soreness and possibly a white cloudy discharge.

Genital Warts These are caused by a virus called HPV and are small warts on or around the genitals and anus. Untreated in women, the infection may lead to cancer of the cervix.

Thrush This is an infection caused by the fungus *Candida*, which forms white patches around the genitals, anus and vagina. Irritation and itching occur, usually with a discharge.

Further information or treatment can be obtained from your nearest GUM clinic. Address can be found in the phone book or from your GP

FURTHER INFORMATION

There are two very good national confidential telephone advice services

National AIDS Helpline

0800 567123 24 hour Freephone

Terrence Higgins Trust

52-54 Grays Inn Road London WC1X 8JU

Tel: 071-242 1010 12noon to 10pm daily

A Crisis of Silence: a report on HIV, AIDS and Older People. ISBN 1 87-709 144.

Copies of this report can be obtained from:

Age Concern Greater London

54 Knatchbull Road London SE5 9QY

Tel: 071-737 3456

LOCAL INFORMATION

Age Concern Lewisham offers a range of services for older people.

Age Concern Lewisham

20 Brownhill Road Catford SE6 2EN

Tel: 081-695 6000 Ext 3352

The Libertines are a social group for older gay men. Tel: 081-695 6000 Ext 3348.

The Positive Place is a drop-in centre for people in South East London living with HIV and AIDS

52 Deptford Broadway, Deptford, London SE8 4PH

Tel: 081 694 9988 Fax 081 694 9900

Lewisham HIV Unit

1st Floor Laurence House 1 Catford Road SE6 4RU

Tel: 081 695 6000 ex 8609

Lewisham Crossroads Care Attendant Scheme

Hollydale, Bromley Road Catford SE6 2UA

Tel: 081 695 0320

BHASEL

Black HIV & AIDS South East London.

c/o Lewisham HIV Unit Address above

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