

HIV & AIDS and the Jewish community / The Terrence Higgins Trust.

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HIV & AIDS

AND THE JEWISH COMMUNITY



The Terrence Higgins Trust



The mitzva of 'bikkur cholim' — caring for the sick — is an important obligation in Judaism. According to the Rabbis, God comes to visit Avraham when he is recuperating in order to teach the importance of visiting the sick (Talmud, Babba Metziah 86b).

Our daily liturgy includes this mitzva on its list of commandments, which promise continued reward (Talmud, Shabbat 127a). The organised Jewish community in the United Kingdom provides for those who are ill, or in need of support and help, through various organisations and voluntary agencies including the Jewish Welfare Board and the Kosher Meals on Wheels Service.

We can do no less for people with AIDS, their families and friends.

While AIDS is a tragedy for the whole community, Jewish tradition requires that, in addition to what we do with others in addressing the whole problem, we must care for our own, those with AIDS and also HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) infection. This caring includes counselling, meeting emergency housing and nutrition needs, legal advice, prevention and education and in particular, support services for their families.

WHAT IS AIDS?

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. An immune deficiency means that the body's immune system is no longer able to protect it against certain infections and cancers. People are then vulnerable to severe illnesses which can threaten their lives.

As yet, there is no vaccine against HIV. Understanding how HIV infection is spread and learning how to prevent its transmission are the only ways to slow the epidemic. There is new information that the disease is spreading into the heterosexual community.

WHAT ARE THE HUMAN COSTS OF AIDS?

Physical illness is just the beginning of the suffering facing many people with AIDS or HIV infection, their families and friends. Many people with AIDS or HIV infection have lost their jobs, been evicted from their homes and been abandoned by frightened friends and families.

Often this discrimination is based on an unfounded fear of infection. This fear is fueled by lack of knowledge about how the disease is transmitted. There is uniform agreement that HIV infection is NOT transmitted through casual contact — shaking hands, attending public events, eating in restaurants or sharing the same workplace. However, the lesson everyone must learn is that AIDS is not just a sexually transmitted disease, for drug users who share equipment to inject drugs are also at risk. It is not limited to homosexual and bisexual men and it is not limited to men and women who have multiple sexual partners.

THE JEWISH RESPONSE

Scientists do not yet know how HIV infection first developed in humans. Our religious leaders have been firm in their repudiation of the suggestion that AIDS is a form of 'divine response' to sinners. AIDS is no more punishment of those it has afflicted than an earthquake in Mexico or famine in Ethiopia. The loving and compassionate God whom Judaism teaches us to revere, does not command us to judge our fellow humans, but to share in the divine work of healing.

The Chief Rabbi Lord Jakobovits, while affirming the traditional Jewish view on sexuality as taught in the Bible, has stated — *"From my reading of Jewish sources, it would appear that under no circumstances would we be justified in branding the incidence of the disease, individually or collectively, as a punishment that singles out individuals or groups for wrongdoing and lets them suffer as a consequence. I therefore strongly reject and oppose those preachers or would-be preachers who declare that it is Divine vengeance, that the wrath of God is being visited on those who deserve it. On the contrary, we should seek to stretch out whatever hand of help, of understanding, of solace, of compassion one can to the sufferers."*

THE COMMUNITY RESPONSE

YOU can be part of the solution. Know the facts. Dispel the myths. Help Jewish agencies which are working with people with AIDS and HIV infection, and their families and friends. If you belong to an organisation, arrange for a meeting on AIDS so that more information can be disseminated on this issue.

We must provide the human support for one another that is part of our tradition as a caring community. We must ensure that people with AIDS and HIV infection do not become strangers in their own lands.

This leaflet is based on that issued by the Jewish
Emergency Assistance Network, San Francisco.

USEFUL NUMBERS

Terrence Higgins Trust
Helpline

071-242 1010

3pm to 10pm daily

Legal Line

071-405 2381

7pm to 10pm Wednesday

Jewish Gay and Lesbian Group

081-958 2955

Jewish Lesbian and Gay Helpline

071-706 3123

7pm to 10pm Monday and Thursday

Jewish AIDS Trust

081-203 7738





The Terrence Higgins Trust is a registered charity which provides practical support, help, counselling and advice for anyone with or concerned about AIDS or HIV infection.

THE TERRENCE HIGGINS TRUST

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Charity reg. no. 288527
Company reg. no. 1778149
Registered in England

HELPLINE

071-242 1010
3pm-10pm daily

LEGAL LINE

071-405 2381
7pm-10pm Wednesday

The work of the Trust is mainly supported by voluntary donations. If you feel this leaflet has been helpful, you may care to send a donation to:

THE TERRENCE HIGGINS TRUST
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LONDON WC1X 8JU