

A.I.D.S. : the facts : compiled with the help and advice of doctors / The Terrence Higgins Trust.

Contributors

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A.I.D.S.

THE FACTS

Compiled with the help and advice of doctors.

THE
TERRENCE HIGGINS TRUST
HELPLINE

01-833 2971

7PM-10PM MONDAY-FRIDAY
3PM-10PM WEEKENDS

WHAT IS AIDS?

An abbreviation used for 'Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome'. It is a complete or partial breakdown in the body's natural ability to fight off diseases which leaves the individual susceptible to some rare cancers and infections. Such infections are sometimes called "opportunistic infections"

WHAT CAUSES AIDS?

AIDS is caused by a virus. The virus is known as HTLV III.

HOW IS IT TRANSMITTED?

Most cases are acquired sexually. The virus may also be spread by infected injection needles, or in certain blood products obtained from infected people. HTLV III virus is not passed on through casual social contact, such as shaking hands or sharing toilet facilities.

HOW WIDESPREAD IS AIDS?

Worldwide, at least 25,000 cases have been reported (December 1985), of which 275 were in the United Kingdom. The numbers have been increasing since 1979 when AIDS was first described; for example by February 1984, 36 cases had been reported in the UK.

HOW SERIOUS IS AIDS?

When the body is unable to fight infections effectively, many diseases, including some that are normally regarded as minor, can progress unchecked and result in death. To date less than a quarter of people with AIDS have survived more than 3 years after diagnosis of the disease.

WHO IS AT RISK?

The main groups at risk are:

- Practising homosexual and bisexual men
- Drug users who share injection equipment
- Haemophiliacs and others who have received blood products
- Sexual partners of these people
- Babies born to infected people

It is exceptionally rare for men and women outside these risk groups to be infected with the virus.

ARE BLOOD TRANSFUSIONS SAFE?

Yes. All blood being used now is checked for signs of infection.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF AIDS?

Remember, most of these symptoms occur in common illnesses readily diagnosed and treated by a doctor. If you have some of these symptoms, it is *not* confirmation that you have AIDS.

- **Profound** fatigue, persisting for weeks but with no obvious cause
- **Unexpected** weight loss of more than 10 pounds in 2 months
- **Persistent** fever or night sweats, lasting several weeks
- New pink to purple blotches, painless, flat or raised, like a bruise, but hard and getting larger; they can be anywhere on the skin including in the mouth or on the eyelids
- Swollen glands, especially in the neck or armpits
- Shortness of breath, gradually getting worse over several weeks, together with a dry, irritating cough

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

If you have any of the symptoms of AIDS and you fall within an identified risk group, you should consult a doctor, preferably at a clinic specialising in sexually transmitted disease (VD). You can get the address of your nearest clinic from your telephone directory (listed under Venereal Disease) or the Trust.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR AIDS?

There is no vaccine to prevent HTLV III infection. There is not yet a cure for AIDS but the opportunistic infections and cancers can be treated with varying success. There is a lot of promising research on new methods of treatment.

WORDS YOU MAY HAVE SEEN IN CONNECTION WITH AIDS

HTLV III Antibody Positive: this is a blood test result showing the person has been infected with the HTLV III virus at some time. It does *not* mean a person has AIDS.

Persistent Generalised Lymphadenopathy (PGL): enlarged lymph glands, lasting more than three months, in otherwise healthy people. It may be a milder illness caused by the same virus as AIDS.

AIDS-Related Complex (ARC): Illnesses caused by HTLV III infection where the opportunistic infections and cancers of AIDS are not found.

Pneumocystis Carinii Pneumonia (PCP): a rare form of pneumonia: more than half the people with AIDS get it. People with normal immune systems cannot catch it.

Kaposi's Sarcoma (KS): a previously rare form of skin cancer; more than 1 in 4 people with AIDS have it. To begin with, KS may look like a bruise, but unlike a bruise it persists and may get larger and more widespread.

Thrush (also known as Candida or Monilia): the oral and vaginal forms of this infection are quite common in healthy people but are more frequent and severe in those with AIDS.

HOW CAN YOU OBTAIN MORE INFORMATION ABOUT AIDS?

This leaflet has been compiled by the Terrence Higgins Trust with the help and advice of doctors. If you need further information, you can write to the Trust at B.M. A.I.D.S. London WC1N 3XX. Please send a stamped self-addressed 9" x 6" envelope. You can also telephone the Trust's AIDS Helpline (01-833 2971) between 7pm and 10pm Monday to Friday and 3pm and 10pm at weekends.

Haemophiliacs requiring further information may prefer to call the Haemophilia Society on 01-407 1010 between 8.30am and 5.00pm Mondays to Fridays. An answer-phone is in operation on both the above lines when the offices are unmanned.

THE
TERRENCE HIGGINS TRUST

A registered charity to inform, advise and help on A.I.D.S. (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).
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