

**HIV, AIDS and Islam : information for Muslim communities : an HIV/AIDS service for the South Asian, Middle Eastern, North African and other excluded communities / NPL, Naz Project London.**

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**Naz Project London**



**HIV, AIDS and Islam  
Information for  
Muslim Communities**

*An HIV/AIDS service for the South Asian,  
Middle Eastern, North African and other  
excluded communities.*



## WHO IS THIS LEAFLET FOR?

This leaflet is for Muslim parents who are unsure about what HIV and AIDS is, and what it means to them and their families, it can also be read by young people themselves. This leaflet will also be of value to those who deal with Muslims in an health advisory role. We hope that once you have read this leaflet you will have a better understanding of how HIV is transmitted and how people can prevent themselves contracting the virus. People reading this should also get a better understanding of Islamic view on HIV and AIDS education. This leaflet also considers why it is important that people deal compassionately and sensitively with those who are living with HIV or AIDS.

## IS HIV A THREAT TO MUSLIM COMMUNITIES?

Every single country in the world has been affected by HIV, including Muslim countries.

The United Nations Joint Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS) estimates that since the start of the global HIV pandemic around 29.4 million people have been infected with HIV. Although many Muslim countries claim that they have not been affected by HIV this is not true. HIV infections have been reported in every Muslim country. According to UNAIDS there are an estimated 200,000 people living with HIV in North Africa and the Middle East. Anyone can become infected with HIV including Muslims.

However, the spread of HIV and AIDS has been slower in Muslim countries and by taking appropriate action now we can control the spread of the virus in our communities. So it is very important for us to know exactly how we can do this. The first step is to understand what HIV is, and how it spreads.

## DO MUSLIMS NEED HIV AND AIDS EDUCATION?

Accurate information about HIV and AIDS will help to control the spread of the disease in our communities. It will also reduce fear and discrimination against people who become HIV positive. Information will also help us to challenge any myths surrounding the disease.

HIV spreads mainly through unprotected vaginal and anal sexual intercourse with an infected person. (It should be noted however, that the practice of anal sex is prohibited in Islam). The virus is also transmitted through the sharing of needles by intravenous drug users. Therefore HIV (the virus which causes AIDS) can affect anyone who engages in these activities, irrespective of their religion.

## ISLAM'S VIEW ON HUMAN LIFE AND HEALTH

Human life is highly valued in Islam, it is considered a gift from Allah. Islam has a very different concept of human life to that of the West. In the Islamic view, Muslims are not supposed to think that it is their life with which they can do whatever they want.





Instead, individuals have been entrusted with life by Allah. We are supposed to look after life and not to abuse it. A healthy body is a gift from Allah, we are the trustees, therefore we have no right to misuse and abuse it.

Our holy Prophet Mohammed peace be upon him (pbuh) has stressed the importance of health many times. He once said to his companion, 'O' Abbas ask Allah for health in this world and in the next. 'An- Nasai'. 'No supplication is more pleasing to Allah than a request for good health'. (Tirmidhi) The Prophet Dawood said, 'Health is a hidden kingdom'. Therefore we should avoid any act which will harm our physical or spiritual health.

### **DOES THE CONCEPT OF MODESTY IN ISLAM PERMIT US TO TALK ABOUT SEX?**

Discussing HIV and AIDS would involve discussing sexual and intimate matters. Islam has always encouraged discussions on matters which will help us in protecting our health and life. Modesty in Islam does not mean that we should not discuss sexual matters. Muslim men and women never felt shy to ask questions to the prophet pbuh about intimate sexual matters. The Holy Qur'an has discussed reproduction, creation, family life, menstruation, and ejaculation.

The Prophet pbuh has said "Blessed are the women of the Ansar (citizens of Madina), shyness did not stand in their way for seeking knowledge about their religion" (Bukhari & Muslim). The Qur'an and hadiths (words and sayings attributed to the Prophet Mohammed pbuh) have repeatedly stressed the importance of acquiring knowledge. "Are they equal those who do, and those who do not know?" Qur'an 39:9. It's through knowledge that we can achieve closeness to Allah, marvel at his creative work, and appreciate divine rules of conduct given in the Holy Book and practised by the Holy prophet and his companions. We should not feel embarrassed or shy when discussing or reading about HIV and AIDS.

However Islam does require people to be modest, so certain subjects should only be discussed between members of the same sex. As far as possible, publications containing explicit graphic illustrations of the sexual organs should not be used.

### **HOW MUSLIMS SHOULD ACT IN THIS TIME OF CRISIS**

Although Islam will only approve of sex between husband and wife it should be acknowledged that in Western societies this view is not held by everyone. Muslim people living in the West can therefore find that the society around them accepts short-term sexual relationships and sex between people of the same sex. This can lead to people behaving in a way that is not acceptable in Islam.





If they do behave in such a way, it is important that they know how they may be putting themselves at risk of acquiring sexually transmitted infections, or even HIV. They should know how to protect themselves from infections. The following information will help in the understanding of HIV and its transmission.

### **WHAT IS HIV?**

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a virus which damages the body's defence system, stopping it from effectively fighting infections. When HIV enters the body our defence system starts fighting the virus. Over time our defence system becomes too weak to protect itself from many different kinds of infections. The virus lives in certain body fluids such as blood, semen, vaginal fluids. It is this virus which causes AIDS.

### **WHAT IS AIDS?**

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome)

A person has developed AIDS when they are affected by certain infections and cancers because their body's defences are weakened.

### **CAN YOU TELL IF A PERSON IS HIV POSITIVE (has HIV in their body)?**

The answer is NO, by looking at someone you can not tell if that person is HIV positive. After the infection, when HIV gets into the body, (a period which may last up to ten or fifteen years) an infected person may feel healthy, and even may not know that they have the HIV virus.

### **HOW HIV CAN GET INTO OUR BODY**

HIV can be transmitted in the following ways:

- Unprotected sex between women and men or between two men.
- By sharing unsterilised needles, syringes and other injecting equipment.
- By blood transfusion with HIV infected blood or blood products eg. plasma or Factor 8.
- Through organ transplants that are infected with HIV.
- Through artificial insemination with HIV infected semen.
- From an infected mother to her baby (either in the womb during labour, delivery or through breast feeding). Rates of HIV transmission from mother to baby in developed countries are currently between 14-25% and 29-40% in developing countries.

If someone is having sex outside of marriage, they should use a condom in order to avoid the exchange of bodily fluids which may be infected. This advice is important for the protection of their husband or wife.





## IS BLOOD TRANSFUSION SAFE?

In the United Kingdom, all blood is checked for the HIV virus therefore it is usually safe to receive blood. It is also safe to give blood as new syringes are used for every blood donor.

## CAN YOU GET HIV THROUGH EVERYDAY CONTACT FROM SOMEONE WHO HAS THE VIRUS?

HIV can not be passed on through everyday contact.

HIV cannot be passed on by touching, shaking hands, kissing, using toilet seats, sharing cups, cutlery, crockery, towels, coughing and sneezing, swimming pools, insect bites.

## HOW CAN YOU PROTECT YOURSELF FROM HIV?

We know that HIV is mainly transmitted through unprotected sex with an infected person or through sharing needles and syringes. Using condoms are the only way to reduce the risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections during sexual intercourse. If used correctly they are up to 98% effective. Injecting drug users should not share injecting equipment. Clean (sterilised) needles and syringes should be used every time in order to reduce the spread of HIV and hepatitis.

## HOW MUSLIMS SHOULD BEHAVE TOWARDS PEOPLE WHO ARE LIVING WITH HIV OR AIDS

There are many Muslims who have been affected by AIDS. These people are someone's daughter, son, brother or sister, they are part of the Muslim community. We cannot shun people living with HIV and AIDS. Any person with AIDS should be given attention, care, love and affection, so the person may lead their life with dignity. We also have no right to judge people and condemn people. It is up to the Almighty to forgive or punish. Islam is a religion that is full of compassion, love and mercy.

The Prophet Mohammed pbuh has reminded Muslims that: "You will not enter into paradise until you believe, and you will not believe until you love one another".

In another Hadith it has been said "Allah shows compassion only to those of His servants who are compassionate."

Love and compassion are the qualities of a good Muslim, people with AIDS cannot be denied these powerful emotions. Visiting and caring for the sick is another good deed that is highly recommended by the Prophet pbuh. "Whoever visits a sick person is walking along the high road to heaven" (Bukhari). A visit to a sick person is only complete when you have put your hand on his forehead and asked him how he is" (Tirmidhi).





People with AIDS need our compassion our love and affection, so do not be afraid to embrace them, and touch them. The Prophet pbuh also said "If you enter the house of a sick man, then only speak good words, for truly the angels will confirm what you say, and they will open up the way to heaven for him" (Nasa'i). There are many more sayings from the messenger of Allah about showing love and compassion to people with ill health. Therefore we must remember what has been expected from us, by Allah.

### **HIV, AIDS and Islam**

Islam is a religion that is very close to human nature. It appreciates the powerful sexual desires humans have. Therefore it encourages that these desires should be fulfilled, it advocates and encourages marriage, and only through marriage should sexual desires be fulfilled. Like other heavenly religions it provides us with a strict moral code for sexual enjoyment.

Islam also prohibits the use of substances, which may impair the senses. Therefore the use of narcotics such as heroin and alcohol are strictly prohibited.

We must recognise that people engage in sexual activities before marriage and are also having extra-marital sex and that there are Muslims who inject drugs and who engage in homosexual and bisexual behaviour.

Islam means the submission or surrender of one's will to Allah, therefore it follows that a Muslim should not be doing any act which is prohibited by Islam. However, we need to be realistic and must face the truth, and the truth is that not all Muslims follow their religion fully.

Sexual practices that are not allowed by our religion do exist. Therefore there is a need that we should accept reality and develop HIV and AIDS educational programmes for all our communities. These programmes must put emphasis on Islamic moral values, but should also inform people about the methods of protection from this life threatening illness.

Some Muslims may think HIV and AIDS is not an issue for the community. The reality is and has been rather different in many Muslim countries. It is therefore becoming extremely important that we should accept that we are equally vulnerable to HIV and AIDS.

Given the increase in HIV infection globally it is more important than ever that we discuss the issue of HIV and Aids openly. For further details about services offered please contact in confidence,

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