

AIDS : an issue for women / Royal Newcastle Hospital.

Contributors

Royal Newcastle Hospital (N.S.W.)

Publication/Creation

[approxintely 1986?]

Persistent URL

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AIDS



**An issue
for women**

CAN WOMEN GET AIDS?

Yes. In the United States about 6% of people who have AIDS proper are women. In West Africa over 50% of people with AIDS are women (figures at July 1986).

Australian women are at risk.

WHAT IS AIDS?

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is caused by a virus, HTLV-3, now known as HIV. People can have this virus in their blood without feeling sick, but they can still infect others. If they are unwell, they may have an AIDS-related condition (ARC), which is a bit like being ill with glandular fever. Having AIDS itself means that the person's immune system, which usually fights disease, is unable to fight it any longer. The person becomes ill, and may die, from rare infections which attach at this point.

THE AIDS ANTIBODY TEST

If someone has been infected with the AIDS virus, antibodies are usually produced in their blood. These antibodies can be detected by a simple blood test. It is important that anyone considering taking the test gets information about it and what the results mean. More information about the test is available on the AIDS hotline:

(049) 266-866

HOW ARE WOMEN INFECTED?

The AIDS virus is carried by the blood and semen. Infection can take place when there is contact between the live virus and the bloodstream. There are two main ways in which women can be at risk:

Having unprotected sex with people infected with the AIDS virus

The AIDS virus is hard to catch. It is passed on by direct contact between virus and the bloodstream. Cells in the vagina and the rectum can pass the AIDS virus into the blood if they are in contact with infected body-fluids (such as semen).

This can happen during unprotected vaginal and anal intercourse.

Sexual partners of all those who are at risk should follow the safe sex guidelines at the end of this pamphlet.

High risk partners

- * Men who are intravenous drug users
- * Men using imported blood products, such as haemophiliacs
- * Men with a high number of sexual partners
- * Men with infected partners
- * Bisexual men

Low risk partners

- * Long-term male partners, who have no other sexual partners
- * Lesbian partners

Sharing needles and syringes to inject intravenous (IV) drugs.

People who inject drugs, whether casually or regularly, are at high risk if they share needles or syringes. Infected blood can be passed directly into the user's bloodstream.

Being in contact with the AIDS virus at work

There is no risk from casual contact with co-workers, patients or clients who may be infected.

LESBIAN WOMEN

Lesbian women are at very low risk of catching the AIDS virus through sexual contact with other women. Infection through sharing body fluids such as menstrual or other blood, faeces, urine and saliva is remotely possible. Lesbians, like all women, are at risk through sharing infected needles and syringes. They are also at risk through artificial insemination, especially if the donor is an I.V. drug user, bisexual or gay.

CAN WOMEN PASS ON THE AIDS VIRUS TO MEN?

Yes, through any unsafe sex practices.

FAMILIES, PARTNERS AND FRIENDS OF INFECTED PEOPLE

No-one sharing a house with people infected with the AIDS virus has ever become infected through casual contact, sharing dishes, cutlery, and household facilities, or being with the infected person.

Guidelines are available from hospitals or your doctor if you are caring for a very ill person at home.

AIDS CANNOT BE CAUGHT THROUGH

- * Being near someone who has AIDS
- * Casual contact like hugging, social kissing or using the same facilities as someone with AIDS
- * Contact with toilet seats, door knobs or second hand clothes, or anything else that has been touched by someone with AIDS

BITING

- * It is extremely unlikely that AIDS could be caught by biting or being bitten by someone who has AIDS

For detailed information on the riskiness of specific activities or situations, ring the AIDS hotline: (049) 266-866.

VISITORS WITH AIDS

Visitors to your home who are infected will not pass on the virus by being present and by using dishes, toilets and washing facilities.

CHILD-TO-CHILD CONTACT

No child has ever been infected with the AIDS virus through casual contact with other children, or through living with an infected child. Infected children should not be seen as a danger to others. AIDS is much harder to catch than the usual diseases passed from child to child.

If you are worried about your child's health, or would like more information about children and AIDS you can call the nationwide, toll-free hotline: (049) 266-866.

PREGNANCY AND AIDS

If the mother is infected with the AIDS virus

- * The child is very likely to be born infected
- * Pregnancy places a stress on the immune system, which may speed up the development of the disease and place the mother at greater risk
- * Breast-feeding is very likely to pass on the virus if the baby is not already infected

Before starting a pregnancy

- * If the mother or father is at risk of being infected it is important to be tested for the AIDS virus, and to get good information on what the results might mean.
- * Women who are considering artificial insemination by donor should check the possible risks of infection. The risk is there whether insemination is carried out medically or self-insemination is used. Testing of sperm or donor for the virus does not absolutely guarantee safety, as tests are not foolproof. Women may prefer to know the donor so they can check if he is at risk for the AIDS virus.

During pregnancy

The unborn child of a healthy mother is not at risk of getting AIDS if the mother has casual contact with people who are infected with the virus. However, there is a flu-like disease called Cytomegalovirus (CMV), that people very ill with AIDS may catch. It can be passed by casual contact and is very dangerous to the unborn.

Pregnant women, like all women, should follow the safe sex guidelines and avoid sharing needles and syringes.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND AIDS

Young people need to know about AIDS and how to prevent it. This stops unnecessary fear, and helps them to protect themselves from infection. They should be familiar with the safe sex guidelines.

SAFE SEX GUIDELINES

- * Do not allow blood, semen, urine, or faeces from your partner to enter your body through mouth, vagina, rectum or open cuts and sores
- * Condoms can stop the AIDS virus. They should be used during intercourse (vaginal and anal) and oral sex, if there is any possibility that you or your partner have been in contact with the AIDS virus
- * Special care should be taken when using condoms for anal intercourse. They can break. A water-based lubricant, such as Glide or Sylke, should be used. These are available from chemists
- * More information on how to use condoms is available from Family Planning Clinics, your doctor, Women's Health Service or the STD Clinic, Royal Newcastle Hospital
- * Talking about the risk of AIDS and about safe sex with any sexual partner is extremely important if you are going to use the guidelines effectively

IF A PARTNER, FAMILY MEMBER OR FRIEND HAS AIDS

Being close to someone with AIDS may mean a lot of extra emotional stress and some practical difficulties. Regional AIDS Support Networks can offer information, counselling, emotional and practical support to friends, partners and family members of people with AIDS.

Contact phone numbers for the regional support group are available from:

Michelle (049) 528-489

John (049) 614-278

MORE INFORMATION ON AIDS

If you have any questions that are not answered by this leaflet, or if you want more information about AIDS and support services you can contact:

STD Clinic
Royal Newcastle Hospital
Pacific Street
Newcastle 2300
Phone: (049) 266-403
(Female Clinic)
(049) 266-594
(Counsellors)

AIDS HOTLINE
(049) 266-866

Leaflets giving more details about AIDS, condom use, the AIDS Antibody Test, and AIDS and I.V. drug use are available from the WOMEN'S HEALTH SERVICE contact through Community Health Centres, Phone: (049) 260-200 or the Department of Health or Phone 266-293.



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:
WORKING WOMEN'S CENTRE
CHR. INDUSTRIAL DR. & AVON ST,
MAYFIELD, 2304
PH: (049) 68-2511