

**AIDS and work : the facts employees should know / prepared by the
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AIDS and Work

THE FACTS EMPLOYEES SHOULD KNOW

Introduction

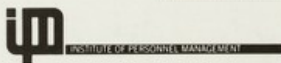
Many people are still confused about AIDS. Much has been said and written about this illness, but it hasn't always been clear. There's one thing we can be sure of: **working with someone who has HIV or AIDS does not put you at risk.**

What are HIV and AIDS? This leaflet explains the difference, and how HIV is, and more importantly, isn't spread.

We all support this leaflet. Please read it carefully.



NATIONAL AIDS TRUST



What are HIV and AIDS?

Many people think HIV and AIDS are the same thing. They are not. AIDS stands for Acquired Immune-Deficiency Syndrome, which comes from infection by the Human Immune-Deficiency Virus (HIV). Once infected with HIV, people remain infected for life, but many people remain healthy for 10 years or more. Gradually HIV stops the body's natural defence mechanisms from working properly, and people with HIV are likely to develop AIDS eventually. They become ill with certain rare infections or cancers.

How HIV - the virus which causes AIDS - is spread

The virus is spread **only** in the following ways:

- sexually, through unprotected intercourse with an infected partner, male or female, 'gay' or 'straight', where semen, vaginal secretions or blood enter the body. Using a condom reduces the risk.
- from exposure to infected blood (eg through sharing drug injecting equipment). **All blood for transfusions in the UK has been screened for HIV since 1986, and blood products are treated to destroy the virus. There is no risk in giving blood.**
- from an infected mother to her unborn child.

There may be a small risk of infection from HIV in a few specialised jobs; eg laboratory staff who handle blood. People whose work involves piercing the skin - acupuncturists, tattooists, ear piercers, and so on - should take special precautions. Free advice leaflets can be ordered by telephoning 0800 555777 and the Health and Safety Executive on 071-221 0870 can give more information.

How you can't get HIV

HIV is not spread through ordinary social and work contact. It's not spread by touch, or through water or air, or by coughing or sneezing. So, you can't be infected by working alongside someone with HIV or AIDS, or by sharing all kinds of ordinary, everyday utensils and appliances - eg cutlery, glasses, plates, telephones, tools, toilets or washing facilities. There has been no case where a family member sharing a house with someone infected with HIV or AIDS has been infected by sharing food utensils and household appliances.

HIV, AIDS and work

People infected with HIV can remain healthy for years (the latest estimates are up to 10 years or more) before AIDS develops, and can work and live quite normally. Between bouts of illness, even those who have developed AIDS may be fit enough to work.

If someone in your workplace has HIV or AIDS:

- **There is no need for any special precautions to be taken.**

Unless you are having unsafe sex with that person or you are sharing their drug injecting equipment, you are not at risk.

- **There is no need to feel threatened or afraid.**

People with AIDS or who are HIV-positive need understanding and support: you should not be frightened or give way to prejudice. Instead, give the same sympathy and support that you would expect from your work mates if you were seriously ill.

First Aid

If you're a 'first aider' at work, you should carefully follow the basic hygiene procedures taught during first aid training which protects you against a whole range of infections, including HIV.

Workers not trained in first aid may also need to give help in an emergency. Remember to avoid direct contact with blood by wearing gloves and use household bleach (1 part bleach diluted with 9 parts water) and disposable paper towels to clear up blood spills. No case of HIV infection has ever been reported as a result of mouth to mouth resuscitation ('the kiss of life') and it should not be withheld in an emergency. For more information, contact the Health and Safety Executive on 071-221 0870.

Employment Rights

There is no reason why employers should refuse to employ people, or sack anyone, with HIV or AIDS.

Your employer can't force you to take a blood test for HIV unless this is in your contract of employment. Even if your work requires

you to have regular medical check-ups, an HIV test can't be added without a legal change to your contract.

If you think you may have been infected by HIV go to a special clinic for advice (look in the phone book under 'Sexually Transmitted Disease Clinic' or 'Genito-Urinary Clinic'), or see your doctor. You could also ring the National AIDS Helpline, free, on 0800 567123.

If you are HIV-positive you don't have to tell anyone at work, although it may be in your own interest to tell your employer if illness starts to affect your job. You should insist that your employer treats this information in total confidence.

If you are dismissed because you have or are suspected to have HIV you may be able to claim unfair dismissal. Ask your union or staff representative for advice with such a claim, or seek legal advice.

Travelling Abroad

If you're going abroad on holiday or as part of your job, pick up a copy of *The Traveller's Guide to Health*, free from any Post Office or telephone 0800 555777 to order a copy.

Some countries test visitors for HIV. You can find out if they do by contacting the country's Embassy or High Commission in London. If a test is needed, have it done in the UK before you go.

How you can help stop the spread of HIV

Anyone who is sexually active and especially anyone also sharing drug injecting equipment is at risk of infection by HIV. There's no

vaccine against HIV, and no cure yet for AIDS either.

If you have any doubts about your sexual partner, don't have unsafe sex. Using a condom reduces the risk of infection.

If you must inject drugs don't borrow or share injecting equipment.

Information and Advice

If you want more information about HIV and AIDS and work, ask your employer or personnel manager. Your union, staff representative or the TUC may also be able to help. Does your employer have a workplace policy on AIDS? If not, ask for one to be introduced. For more information on HIV and AIDS generally ring:

National AIDS Helpline 0800 567123 (24-hour service)
(All calls are free and ethnic language services are available)
Terrence Higgins Trust 071-242 1010 (3pm-10pm daily)
National AIDS Trust 071-383 4246

All calls are treated in complete confidence

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