



HEALTH EDUCATION COUNCIL

AIDS

WHAT EVERYBODY
NEEDS TO KNOW

November
1986

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	2
WHAT IS AIDS?	3
WHAT CAUSES AIDS?	4
WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF AIDS?	5
WHERE DID AIDS COME FROM?	6
HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE AFFECTED?	7
HOW IS THE HIV VIRUS PASSED ON?	8
HOW CAN YOU REDUCE YOUR RISK OF GETTING THE VIRUS?	10
HOW CAN YOU TELL IF YOU HAVE THE HIV VIRUS?	13
WHAT IF YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO HAS THE VIRUS?	14
WHAT IS BEING DONE?	15
FURTHER INFORMATION	16

INTRODUCTION

This booklet is all about AIDS. It tells you about the illness, the size of the problem, who it affects, what *you* can do to reduce your risk of getting AIDS and where to go for further help and information.

A large number of people who have AIDS are homosexual men. But it's important to remember that AIDS can affect other people too.

Any incurable disease is frightening, especially when it is infectious and when so much about the disease is still unknown. You can find out what is known about AIDS by reading this booklet. The more you know and understand, the more you can do to reduce your risk of ever getting AIDS and to help control the spread of AIDS in this country.

WHAT IS AIDS?

AIDS is a condition which develops when the body's defences are not working properly. As a result, people are more likely to get illnesses which the body would normally be able to fight off easily. These illnesses can be serious or fatal. At the moment there is no treatment which can cure AIDS.

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

Acquired means that it's caught from someone or something as opposed to being inherited.

Immune Deficiency – you've got an immune deficiency when your body can't defend itself against certain illnesses.

Syndrome – the particular pattern of illnesses you can get as a result.

Many AIDS patients develop particular forms of cancer. They may also get serious infections in the lungs, digestive system, central nervous system and in the skin.

Two illnesses commonly found in AIDS patients are:

- *Kaposi's sarcoma* – a rare form of cancer mainly of the skin, but also affecting other parts of the body.
- *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia – a serious infection of the lungs.

WHAT CAUSES AIDS?

AIDS is caused by a virus called HIV (previously called HTLV-III).

When you catch a virus, the virus makes its way into your blood. Certain white blood cells then produce *antibodies* which attack and kill the virus. But when the HIV virus gets into the blood, it can actually destroy those white blood cells, leaving the body wide open to attack from other infections.

Anyone who has the HIV virus could pass the virus on to someone else. They could pass it on *either* if they have intimate sexual contact with another person, *or* if their infected blood gets into another person's body. The ways the virus is passed on are described in more detail on page 8.

Experts think that up to 40,000 people in the UK may already have been infected with HIV.

But just because somebody gets HIV virus, it doesn't automatically follow that he or she will get AIDS. Of the 40,000 people in the UK thought to have been infected with HIV virus, fewer than 600 had developed AIDS by the end of September 1986. Where this has happened, it has taken anything between 6 weeks and 5 years, and sometimes longer.

The majority of the 40,000 have remained fit and well. No-one yet knows why the HIV virus affects different people in such different ways.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF AIDS?

When you begin to read this list of symptoms, you might start thinking, "Yes, I've got that ... and that ... and that. Oh, no ..., I must have AIDS ...". But remember:

- AIDS is rare.
- It's only if you have many of these symptoms together and they last for a long time that AIDS might possibly be the cause.
- There can be lots of other reasons for nearly all these symptoms. For example, swollen glands can be a sign of glandular fever. Tiredness, fever and weight loss are much more likely to be signs of worry or going without sleep, or a sign of flu coming on.

The symptoms which *may* suggest AIDS are:

Swollen glands, especially in the neck and armpits.

Profound fatigue, which lasts for several weeks, with no obvious cause.

Unexpected weight loss – more than 10 pounds (4.5 kg) in two months.

Fever and night sweats, lasting for several weeks.

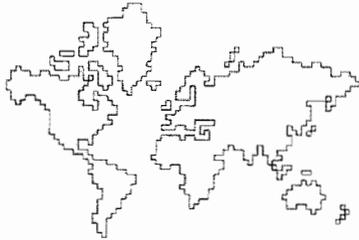
Diarrhoea which lasts for more than a week, with no obvious cause.

Shortness of breath and a dry cough lasting longer than it would if it were just from a bad cold.

Skin disease – newly formed pink to purple blotches, appearing on the skin, including in the mouth or on the eyelids. They are usually hard, and look a bit like a bruise or a blood blister.

Remember – some of these symptoms are very common, so don't jump to the conclusion that you have AIDS just because you have one of them. Being over-anxious about getting AIDS could even cause some of the symptoms. But, if you *are* worried, talk it over with your own doctor or a doctor at an STD clinic (for details about STD clinics, see page 16).

WHERE DID AIDS COME FROM?



The first report of AIDS came from the United States. In 1981 a doctor found 5 previously healthy young men with *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia, a very rare type of infection. In the same year came reports of 26 men who had developed *Kaposi's sarcoma*, a rare form of cancer. All of these men were homosexuals.

Until 1981, both these diseases had only been found in people whose *immune system* was not working properly. (Normally if a virus enters your body, your natural *immune system* will produce antibodies in the blood which attack and kill the virus.)

The fact that these two diseases were now appearing in previously healthy young men suggested that something had severely damaged their immune system. This new condition was called AIDS – Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

Doctors very quickly discovered that AIDS is caused by a virus now called HIV. But so far they have not found a way to fight the virus, or to vaccinate people against it.

There have been cases of AIDS in the United States, in virtually every European country, in central Africa and in many other countries worldwide. But no-one knows for sure which country the HIV virus first came from.

HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE AFFECTED?

By the end of October 1986 it was estimated that more than 40,000 people in the UK had been infected with the HIV virus. 548 of these had developed AIDS.

In the UK, nearly 90% of people with AIDS are homosexual or bisexual men. But in central African countries, for example, AIDS affects men and women equally. No-one knows for sure why AIDS has followed such a different pattern there.

In the United States there were over 26,000 cases of AIDS by October 1986.

Cases of AIDS in the UK up to October 1986:

- 496 **Homosexual or bisexual men**
Homosexuals are men who have sexual intercourse with other men. Bisexual men have sexual intercourse with women and men.
- 31 **Haemophiliacs and people who were infected by blood transfusion**
Haemophiliacs are people who need special blood products to help their blood to clot. Since 1985 in this country, all blood has been screened and blood products heat treated. This has greatly reduced the risk of people getting the virus in this way.
- 8 **Drug misusers**
Those who inject themselves.
- 19 **Others**
These include men and women who seem to have caught the virus by having sex with an infected partner of the opposite sex, and some early cases of AIDS where complete details about the patients are not known.

Total = 548 By October 1986, 278 of these people had died of AIDS.

HOW IS THE HIV VIRUS PASSED ON?

The HIV virus only survives in body fluids such as blood, semen, saliva and tears. However, no-one has caught AIDS from saliva or tears. All proven cases have been caused by semen or blood.

People can get the virus:

- through intimate sexual contact, or
- by getting infected blood into their bloodstream.

INTIMATE SEXUAL CONTACT

If you have sex with a person who already has the HIV virus, you could get the virus yourself. But some types of intercourse are much more risky than others (see page 10). And of course, the more people you have sex with, the more likely you are to have sex with an infected person.

The virus can be passed on either in sexual intercourse between homosexuals or in intercourse between a man and a woman.

INFECTED BLOOD

If you inject yourself using an unsterilised needle and syringe which have been used by an infected person, you could catch the virus yourself. Drug misusers are particularly at risk. And of course once you have the virus you could pass it on to your partner through sexual intercourse.

In the past, some people were given blood or blood products which had been infected with HIV virus. Haemophiliacs, in particular, caught the virus in this way. Now, in this country, all donated blood is tested before it is used and blood products are heat treated to reduce the risk of infection.

CAN THE HIV VIRUS BE PASSED ON IN OTHER WAYS?

Women who have the virus can pass it on to their baby during pregnancy (through the placenta), at birth or through their breastmilk.

Normal everyday contact with an infected person is perfectly safe. The virus is not passed on through touching or shaking hands, or through saliva or tears.

You cannot catch the virus by touching objects used by an infected person: cups, cutlery, glasses, food, clothes, towels, toilet seats and door knobs. Swimming pools are also safe.

The virus itself is not very strong. It does not survive for long in the open and it cannot withstand heat or household bleach.

HOW CAN YOU REDUCE YOUR RISK OF GETTING THE VIRUS?

A lot of work is being done to develop a vaccine to protect people from the virus, but it is unlikely that one will be available in the near future.

Here is some advice to help you reduce your risk of getting the virus.

- **The fewer sexual partners you have, the less risk you have of coming into contact with someone who has the virus.**

- **The fewer partners your partner has, the less risk of you getting the virus.**

- **The way you have sex also affects the risk. But of course, you will only catch the virus if you have sex with an infected partner.** If you are unsure of your partner, remember that some ways of having sex are much more risky than others:

- Anal intercourse (when the penis enters the rectum, or back passage) is *particularly risky*. This may be because the walls of the rectum are much more delicate and more likely to tear than those of the vagina, making it easier for the virus to pass from one person to another.

- Vaginal intercourse (when the penis enters the woman's vagina) is also risky.

- Oral sex is where one partner stimulates the other's genitals with their mouth or tongue. Oral sex carries some risk because there is always a chance that the virus could pass from the man's semen into the other person's body.

- Any practice that breaks the skin or draws blood, either inside the vagina or anus or on the skin, could increase the risk of getting the virus.

- Sharing sex toys, such as vibrators, could be risky as they could carry the infection from one person to another.

- **Safer Sex**

- Using a condom (a sheath, or rubber), during sex will reduce the risk of getting the virus and other sexually transmitted diseases too. If you use a lubricant with the condom, make sure the lubricant is water-based rather than oil-based. Oil-based ones tend to weaken the rubber.

- There is no risk involved in masturbation or in partners caressing each other.

- For more detailed information about safer sex, contact *The Terrence Higgins Trust, London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard* or *Healthline Telephone Service*. Or, for people with haemophilia, *The Haemophilia Society*. (All addresses and phone numbers on pages 16-17.)

- **Avoid sharing any device that punctures the skin, unless it has been properly sterilised.** This includes hypodermic needles, syringes, ear-piercing equipment, tattooing and acupuncture needles.

There is no need to worry about getting infected by a needle if you are donating blood to the National Blood Transfusion Service, because a new needle is used for each donor.

Any needles or syringes which doctors, nurses, dentists or other medical staff use more than once are always completely sterilised each time.

- **For drug misusers, the easiest way to avoid the risk of getting the virus is not to inject drugs. But if you do inject, always use your own set of works. Never share with anybody, no matter how well they may seem to you. And don't mix your gear up in a spoon or mixing bowl used by other people. When you have used your needle and syringe, bend back the needle and put it in a**

HOW CAN YOU TELL IF YOU HAVE THE HIV VIRUS?

tin which can later be thrown away in a dustbin or burnt.

- To prevent infected blood from entering your bloodstream, **it's best not to share razors or toothbrushes** (because many people's gums bleed when they brush their teeth).
- Until more is known about AIDS, **women who have the HIV virus should avoid becoming pregnant**. If a woman who has the virus gets pregnant, she is more likely to go on to develop AIDS herself. And she may pass the virus on to her baby.

There is a special blood test called the *HIV antibody blood test*. It is available to anyone who is worried and thinks they may have the virus.

The test shows whether you have developed *antibodies* to the virus. Whenever a new virus enters your bloodstream, your blood builds up antibodies to fight off the virus.

If the test shows that you *have* the antibodies, it means that you *have* been in contact with the HIV virus. But the test *cannot* tell whether you will go on to develop AIDS.

If you think you might have the virus and you want to have a blood test, think about it carefully. Before having the test, it may help to talk to someone, to work out how you will react if the test shows that you have been in contact with the virus.

You can get advice about having the blood test from:

- *any STD clinic* (see page 16 for details)
- *The Terrence Higgins Trust* (see page 16 for details)
- *London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard* on (01) 837 7324, or
- your own doctor.
- People with haemophilia, and their partners, can get advice from their Haemophilia Centre Director.

If you want to have the blood test, go to:

- *any STD clinic* (see page 16 for details), or
- your own doctor.
- People with haemophilia, and their partners, can arrange the test through their Haemophilia Centre.

The result of the test will be available in 3 to 8 weeks. If your test result is positive, you will be offered special counselling. You will be asked not to donate any blood, sperm, body organs or tissue.

WHAT IF YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO HAS THE VIRUS?

There is no known case of anyone catching the virus from ordinary day-to-day contact with someone who has the virus – say a friend or someone at your work. So there's no need to have separate cups, glasses, plates or cutlery.

But do take care with any spilt blood. Spilt blood should be cleaned up – if possible by the person it comes from. Put on rubber gloves and wipe up the blood using bleach diluted 1 in 10 with water.

If you live with someone who has HIV virus, or if you are in very close contact with someone who has AIDS, you will need extra information. See *Further information* on page 16.

If there is a child with HIV virus at your child's school or playgroup, there is no danger of the virus being passed on during ordinary school activities. Your child's headteacher has received special advice. If you are at all worried, talk to him or her about it.

Do remember how people with the virus must be feeling. They can feel very isolated. You can help them by treating them just as you would normally. Making time to talk and listen to them can be a great help.

WHAT IS BEING DONE?

- Millions of pounds are being spent on medical research in the United States, Belgium, France, the UK and other countries, to try to find a cure for AIDS and ways of preventing it in the future.
- People with AIDS are receiving special treatment at several hospitals in the UK.
- There are now specially trained AIDS counsellors who can be contacted through your local Health Authority or Health Board. They can advise people about the blood test and give counselling to those who are found to have HIV, and to their families and friends.
- The Department of Health has produced guidelines for doctors and other health care workers to help control the spread of the HIV virus. Education Authorities, the police force, and other groups are also receiving special advice.

Until more is found out about AIDS, the only way of protecting yourself and others from the HIV virus is by following as much of the advice in this booklet as you can.

FURTHER INFORMATION

STD Clinics

(Sexually Transmitted Disease Clinics)

- Can give you general advice about AIDS.
- Can give you the HIV virus antibody test.
- Offer special advice and counselling for people who have the virus or AIDS itself, and for their relatives and friends.

STD clinics give free and confidential advice and treatment. You don't need a letter from your own doctor. You can turn up at many clinics without an appointment. However, some clinics prefer you to make an appointment, so phone them first to check on their arrangements.

To find your nearest STD clinic, look in the phone book under *Veneral Disease* or under *Sexually Transmitted Disease*. If you have difficulty in finding it, then phone one of these places:

- your nearest main hospital
- London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard (01) 837 7324
- Family Planning Information Service (01) 636 7866

Terrence Higgins Trust

BM/AIDS

London WC1N 3XX

Telephone Helpline (01) 833 2971

Monday to Friday 7 p.m.- 10 p.m.

Saturday and Sunday 3 p.m.- 10 p.m.

- Offers help and counselling to people with HIV virus or AIDS itself, and their friends and relatives.
- Gives detailed information on what is safe sex and what is risky sex.
- Gives advice and information to people thinking of having the HIV antibody blood test.

Your own doctor

- Can give you general advice about AIDS and HIV virus.
- Can arrange for you to have the HIV virus antibody test.
- Some doctors give counselling to patients who have the virus.

London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard

(01) 837 7324

- Can answer general queries about AIDS.
- Can put you in touch with local gay support groups.
- Can tell you where your local STD clinic is.

The Haemophilia Society

123 Westminster Bridge Road

London SE1 7HR

(01) 928 2020

- Offers advice for people with haemophilia and their partners.

SCODA (Standing Conference on Drug Abuse)

1-4 Hatton Place

London EC1N 8ND

(01) 430 2341

- Has a full list of local services for drug users throughout the country.

Healthline Telephone Service

(01) 981 2717 (01) 980 7222

(0345) 581151

(If you are phoning from outside London, use the 0345 number and you will be charged at local rates.)

For up-to-date recorded information on AIDS, and advice on safer sex, drug abuse and blood transfusions. This is a confidential 24-hour service started by the College of Health.

For further copies of this booklet, please contact your local health education unit (listed in the phone book under the name of your local Health Authority).

Single copies can be ordered from
Dept A
P.O. Box 100
Milton Keynes
MK1 1TX



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