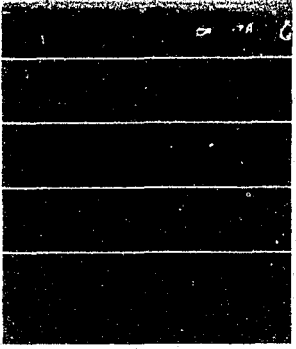


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AIDS

and Your

Job—Are

There

Risks?

4-87-81



American
Red Cross



U.S. Public
Health Service

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U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice

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AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) is a frightening disease, but no one should be afraid of catching it at work.

AIDS is caused by a virus* that does not survive well outside the body. The virus is *not* spread by casual, nonsexual contact. This means that you can't catch AIDS from a cough, a sneeze, a handshake, or a hug. Nor can you catch it from the food you eat, no matter who prepared or served that food. You won't get AIDS by working closely with a coworker who has the disease. Nor will you get it by having coffee, going to lunch, or sharing toilet facilities with that person.

Careful studies have shown that doctors, nurses, and medical technicians who have taken care of AIDS patients have not contracted the disease from them. Scientists have not found a single instance in which the AIDS virus has been spread through ordinary nonsexual contact in a family, work, or social setting.

AIDS, in fact, is a very hard disease to catch. Yet recent surveys have shown that almost one third of the American population believes AIDS can be spread by casual contact, in spite of all scientific evidence to the contrary. Fear of the unknown may help to explain why some people react in this way, since people tend to fear what they do not understand. The purpose of this brochure is to give you facts about AIDS—facts that can save you needless worry about catching AIDS from coworkers.

If AIDS Is Not Spread by Casual Contact, How Does It Spread?

The two main ways the AIDS virus is spread are sexual contact and sharing of contaminated needles and syringes among users of illegal intravenous (IV) drugs. The virus can also be passed on from infected mothers to their babies during pregnancy, at birth, or shortly after birth (probably through breast milk).

In a small number of cases, the virus has been

*The virus that causes AIDS and related disorders has several different names: HTLV-III, LAV, ARV, and most recently HIV. In this brochure, it is called "the AIDS virus."

spread through blood transfusions and through blood products (clotting factors) used to treat patients with hemophilia and other blood clotting disorders. But today the chances that anyone will get AIDS in this way are extremely small, for these reasons:

- Blood collection centers screen donors carefully to prevent people at risk for AIDS from donating blood.
- All donated blood is now tested for antibody to the AIDS virus. (Antibodies are substances produced in the blood to fight disease organisms.) When donated blood tests positive for the AIDS antibody, it is discarded; it never enters the blood supply.
- Clotting factor products are now heated or treated chemically to destroy the virus.

About 98 percent of all AIDS cases reported in this country to date have occurred in the following groups of people:

- Sexually active homosexual and bisexual men (or men who have had sex with another man since 1977) (65 percent)
- Present or past users of illegal IV drugs (17 percent)
- Homosexual and bisexual men who are also IV drug abusers (8 percent)
- Persons who have had transfusions with blood or blood products (2 percent)
- Persons with hemophilia or other blood clotting disorders who have received clotting factor products (1 percent)
- Heterosexual men and women (these include sex partners of persons with AIDS or at risk for AIDS, and people born in countries where spread of the virus by heterosexual sex is thought to be more common than in the United States) (4 percent)
- Infants born to mothers infected with the AIDS virus (1 percent)

About 2 percent of AIDS patients do not fall into any of these groups, but scientists believe that the virus was spread to them in similar ways. Some patients could not be followed up, or died before complete medical histories could be taken.

The AIDS Virus and Its Effects

AIDS was first reported in the United States in 1981. By September 1986, the Public Health Service had received reports of more than 24,000 people with AIDS, 54 percent of whom had died. No one has recovered from the disease.

The virus that causes AIDS damages the body's natural immune defenses against disease and can also infect cells in the brain. People who have AIDS develop unusual, life-threatening illnesses that do not affect people with normal immune systems. It is the appearance of these unusual illnesses that makes possible the diagnosis of AIDS. Two of the illnesses most often seen in AIDS patients are *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia (a parasitic infection of the lungs) and Kaposi's sarcoma (a rare type of cancer), although patients may develop other kinds of cancers and infections as well.

Infection with the AIDS virus does not always lead to AIDS itself. Some infected persons have developed a condition that scientists call "AIDS-related complex" (ARC). Symptoms of ARC include fatigue, fever, loss of appetite and weight, diarrhea, night sweats, and swollen lymph nodes in the neck, armpits, or groin. Anyone with one or more of these symptoms for more than two weeks should see a doctor.

Public Health Service scientists estimate that 1 to 1½ million Americans—in addition to those known to have AIDS—have been infected by the AIDS virus and carry it in their bodies. Many of these persons show no signs of illness and do not know they carry the virus; however, they can spread it to others in the ways that have already been explained. The Public Health Service has urged persons at high risk for infection by the AIDS virus (see box) to consider taking the test for the AIDS antibody so that, if the test is positive, they can take appropriate action to prevent further spread of the virus.

A positive result on the antibody test does *not* mean that a person has AIDS or will necessarily go on to develop either AIDS or AIDS-related illnesses. It does mean that the person has been infected by the virus and may be capable of transmitting it throughout his or her lifetime.

Information about where to get the AIDS antibody test is available from private physicians, health clinics, and state and local health departments.

AIDS and Your Job

Again, it should be emphasized that a fellow employee who has AIDS or who carries the AIDS virus does not pose a danger to you. Remember, the virus is not spread in the air you breathe or the food you eat; nor is it spread by routine, nonsexual, everyday contact.

For workers in general, then, there is no need for worry or special precautions. Following are guidelines and answers to some questions that may arise for workers in particular occupations.

Food Handlers

Because the AIDS virus is not transmitted in food, people who work with food, such as cooks, caterers, waiters, bartenders, airline attendants, and others, should not be restricted from work because they have AIDS or have been infected by the AIDS virus.

All food service workers, including those with AIDS, should, of course, observe good personal hygiene and sanitary food-handling procedures. They should take particular care to avoid injury to their hands while preparing food.

Sanitation guidelines require that any food that becomes contaminated with blood from a cut be thrown away. Food service workers with AIDS or AIDS virus infection should be restricted from work if they have open sores or skin lesions or illnesses for which any other food handler would also be restricted.

Personal Service Workers

Beauticians, barbers, cosmetologists, electrologists, manicurists, and similar personal service workers routinely observe procedures that protect them and their clients from bacterial and viral infections. The risk of spreading the AIDS virus in these settings is

very low, but when instruments that could draw blood are used, sterilizing equipment is important.

- Instruments that penetrate the skin, such as ear-piercing devices and needles used for electrolysis, tattooing, and acupuncture, should be discarded after one use, or thoroughly cleaned and disinfected between uses with a chemical germicide.
- The same procedure should be followed for other instruments, such as razors or cuticle scissors.
- A personal service worker with open sores or weeping sores should refrain from direct client contact until the wound is healed.

All instruments used by personal service workers should be sterilized or disinfected between uses. Information on commercial germicides may be obtained from the Disinfectant Branch, Office of Pesticides, Environmental Protection Agency, 401 M St., S.W., Washington, DC 20460.

Workers With Jobs Requiring Special Precautions

Police personnel, firefighters, emergency medical workers, and prison employees may be exposed to blood or other body fluids of people with AIDS or AIDS-related disorders because of accidents, fires, or violence. Fortunately, by observing a few simple rules, workers can avoid infection.

- Avoid wounds from weapons and punctures from hypodermic needles used by drug abusers. Blood on these articles could cause infection.
- Use disposable gloves in handling contaminated articles.
- Place contaminated articles in a cut-proof evidence bag to be taken to a laboratory for examination or disposal.
- Clean up blood spills promptly with freshly diluted household bleach—one part bleach to 10 parts water.
- If mouth-to-mouth resuscitation is necessary for a person with AIDS, use an "S-tube" or a hand-operated resuscitator bag.

- Wash your hands after exposure to any possible source of infection. Hand washing reduces the chance of spread of infection.
- Wear protective masks, gloves, gowns, and shoe coverings, if there is a chance of exposure to blood or other body fluids of someone with AIDS.

For More Information...

More information about AIDS and AIDS-related illnesses can be obtained from—

- Your union representative or personnel department.
- Your doctor.
- Your state or local health department.
- The Public Health Service's toll-free hotline: 1-800-342-AIDS.
- Your local chapter of the American Red Cross.

Persons at Increased Risk of Infection by the AIDS Virus

Persons in the following groups are at increased risk of infection by the AIDS virus:

- Homosexual and bisexual men (or men who have had sex with another man since 1977)
- People who inject illegal intravenous drugs or who have done so in the past
- Persons with symptoms of AIDS or AIDS-related illnesses
- Persons from Haiti and Central African countries, where heterosexual transmission is thought to be more common than in the United States
- Male or female prostitutes and their sex partners
- Sex partners of persons infected with the AIDS virus or at increased risk of infection
- Persons with hemophilia who have received clotting factor products
- Infants of high-risk or infected mothers

