



HIV/AIDS

AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) was first reported in the United States in 1981 and has since become a major worldwide epidemic. AIDS is caused by HIV (human immunodeficiency virus). By killing or damaging cells of the body's immune system, HIV progressively destroys the body's ability to fight infections and certain cancers. People diagnosed with AIDS may get life-threatening diseases called opportunistic infections, which are caused by microbes such as viruses or bacteria that usually do not make healthy people sick. In 2006, approximately 1.1 million people in the U.S. were living with HIV/AIDS. This includes diagnosed and undiagnosed cases.

AIDS has disproportionately affected African Americans, Hispanics, men who have sex with men (MSM), and individuals in poverty. According to the CDC, AIDS affects ten times more African Americans and three times more Hispanics than Whites. In 2007, almost three quarters of HIV/AIDS diagnoses were for male adolescents and adults, and the largest estimated proportions of HIV/AIDS diagnoses were for MSM.

AIDS History: Diagnosis and Death

HIV was first identified in the United States in 1981 after a number of gay men started getting sick with a rare type of cancer. It took several years for scientists to develop a test for the virus, to understand how HIV was transmitted between humans, and to determine what people could do to protect themselves.

In 2008, the CDC adjusted its estimate of new HIV infections because of new technology developed by the agency. Before this time, CDC estimated there were roughly 40,000 new HIV infections each year in the United States. New results shows there were dramatic declines in the number of new HIV infections from a peak of about 130,000 in the mid 1980s to a low of roughly 50,000 in the early 1990s. Results also shows that new infections increased in the late 1990s, followed by a leveling off since 2000 at about 55,000 per year. In 2006, an estimated 56,300 individuals were infected with HIV.

AIDS cases began to fall dramatically in 1996, when new drugs became available. Today, more people than ever before are living with HIV/AIDS. The CDC estimates that about 1 million people in the United States are living with HIV or AIDS. About one quarter of these people do not know that they are infected; not knowing puts them and others at risk.

One quarter of all newly diagnosed HIV/AIDS cases were for those aged 20-29. The age ranges 40-49 and 30-39 were only slightly higher, at 27% and 26%, respectively. From 2003 to 2007, it appears that fewer HIV infections have progressed to AIDS. The number of people dying from AIDS has been decreasing each year. It is unclear if this trend will continue.

Men who have sex with men make up the largest population living with HIV (45%). Persons engaging in high-risk heterosexual contact are the second highest group (27%). Those who contracted HIV through injection drug use are the third highest group (22%). Those exposed through both male-to-male sexual contact and injection drug use make up a smaller percentage (5%).

Facts about HIV Transmission

HIV is a virus that is spread through the exchange of HIV-infected body fluids, like blood, semen, vaginal secretions, and breast milk. This exchange can occur in several ways:

- Having unprotected (without a condom) sexual intercourse
- Having unprotected sexual contact
- Sharing needles or syringes used for injecting drugs or body piercing
- Receiving contaminated blood products
- During pregnancy from mother to her unborn baby
- During nursing from mother to her baby through breast milk

Myths about HIV Transmission

HIV is not transmitted through casual contact. The virus cannot be transmitted by any of the following methods:

- Shaking hands
- Hugging
- Coughing
- Sneezing
- Kissing
- Sharing water fountains
- Sharing bathrooms
- Sharing eating utensils
- Sharing drinks
- Getting a mosquito or tick bite

Protect Yourself

It is important to note that you do not have to have sexual intercourse to contract or spread HIV. Because the virus is found in both semen and vaginal secretions, it can be passed through any intimate sexual contact. This can include penis-vagina, penis-rectum, mouth-rectum, mouth-vagina, or mouth-penis contact. Abstaining from sex is the only method that offers 100% protection from contracting HIV/AIDS. Since HIV is only spread through the exchange of contaminated body fluids, there are several things you can do to avoid contracting, or lower your risk of contracting, the virus:

- Abstain from sexual contact
- Abstain from intravenous drug use
- Have sex with only one partner, who is having sex with only you (both tested negative)
- Use a new latex condom each time you have sex
- Use a condom or dental dam each time you engage in oral sex
- For activities requiring needles, use only sterilized new needles
- Use clean needles (soaked in non-diluted bleach for at least 2 minutes)
- Avoid sharing needles with others

If you are allergic to latex condoms, male and female condoms are also available in polyurethane. Make sure that the condoms you choose, as well as any lubrication you use, are water-based (KY Jelly, for example). Petroleum-based lubricants, like Vaseline and baby oil, can destroy condoms and prevent them from providing ample protection against STIs and pregnancy. Lambskin condoms are porous and do NOT offer protection against HIV or other STIs.

If you are pregnant or may become pregnant, consider being tested for HIV so that you can learn how you may be able to protect your baby from contracting the virus. If you believe you might have contracted HIV, do not breastfeed your baby, as the virus can be transmitted through breast milk.

Sources

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HIV Testing Programs

Voluntary counseling, testing, and referral programs (CTR) provide people an opportunity to learn their current HIV status, receive counseling about any behavioral changes needed to avoid infection or infecting others, and receive information and referrals to additional prevention programs, medical or other services.

Confidential HIV Testing

Testing means that you give your name when getting tested. Only medical personnel or state health departments have access to the test results. You must provide written permission before this information can be revealed to others.

Anonymous HIV Testing

Testing means that no name is given to the testing center and only you are aware of the results. Anonymous testing is available in 39 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Test results are given by randomly assigned numbers at the time of testing.

Standard Blood Test

This was the first HIV antibody test developed and made available and is the most widely used.

Oral Mucosal Transudate Test

This test, an alternative to the standard blot test, uses a specifically treated pad placed in a person's mouth, and gently rubbed between the lower cheek and gum. The pad collects an oral fluid called oral mucosal transudate (OMT). This fluid contains HIV antibodies in an HIV infected person. This test does not test for HIV in saliva.

Rapid HIV Antibody Tests

While the standard HIV antibody testing procedure requires up to two weeks for results, the rapid test produces results in 5 to 60 minutes. Currently approved rapid HIV tests only test with blood. To perform the test, a finger-stick sample of blood is collected from an individual and transferred to a vial where it is mixed with a developing solution. Other rapid HIV testing methods have also been developed.

Interpreting Test Results

A negative test result indicates the absence of HIV antibodies at the time of the test. All we can safely conclude from a negative HIV antibody test result is that an individual was not infected as of 6 months prior to taking the test, because it can take up to 6 months for the immune system to produce antibodies of HIV. If the individual has participated in risky behaviors anytime during the past 6 months prior to the test, the test needs to be repeated. A positive test result means they are infected with HIV. It cannot indicate when or if individuals will develop AIDS.

Finding a Test Site

Contact your campus health service, visit www.hivtest.org, or call the CDC National Hotline: 1-800-232-4636; (TTY 1-800-232-6348) to locate a testing center in your area.

Conducting a Testing Day on Campus

For more information on how you can conduct an HIV testing day on your campus and for campaign materials, visit the National HIV Testing Day official website at www.hivtest.org

