

**AIDS
INFO**

**What
we
know**

In the past, people feared and dreaded dangerous infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria or the plague. Today AIDS inspires a similar fear, and the public, and in particular the medical profession, are devoting considerable attention to this disease.

What is AIDS?

AIDS stands for "Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome" and the medical name for a hitherto unknown infectious disease.

A virus called HIV is almost certainly the cause of AIDS.

The incubation period for AIDS is up to five years, which means that the disease can appear up to five years after a person has been infected with the virus.

The virus weakens the individual's immune system, with the result that the body's defence mechanism breaks down and the organism is unable to resist various pathogens, even though they are not particularly dangerous in themselves. This then leads to infections and subsequent illnesses such as pneumonia (*Pneumocystis carinii*) or various forms of cancer (Kaposi's sarcoma).

However, not everyone infected with the virus will manifest the symptoms of AIDS; in other words, a carrier of the virus need by no means be or become an AIDS patient. Many carriers of the virus survive the infection without becoming ill.

Symptoms

A doctor should definitely be consulted if the fol-

lowing symptoms are persistent or recurrent:

- above normal temperature/fever;
- fatigue;
- diarrhoea;
- abnormal weight loss;
- swollen lymph nodes;
- perspiration and a dry cough;
- fungus infections of the mouth and throat.

The above symptoms do not apply only to AIDS, but also to many other minor illnesses.

If the reader believes that he/she has one of the above symptoms there is no need to panic. However, when several of the symptoms are observed over a period of several weeks, at least the family doctor should be consulted immediately.

Groups at risk

From the evidence available to date it has been established that the following groups are affected most by AIDS and are therefore most at risk:

- homosexuals;
- bisexuals;
- drug addicts;
- haemophiliacs who require constant blood transfusions;
- sexual partners of the above-mentioned groups;
- new-born babies of infected mothers.

Infection

The disease is transmitted when the virus enters the bloodstream. The virus is most likely to be transmitted during sexual intercourse, particularly during sexual practices involving an increased risk of injury. In the case of drug addicts, the virus is transmitted by sharing syringes. **It is virtually impossible for the disease to be transmitted through saliva, kissing, crockery, and shaking hands, i.e. through direct contact or articles of clothing.** There

are, for example, no reports to date of the disease having been transmitted in schools, at work, in restaurants, swimming baths, when shopping or at social gatherings.

Medical treatment

There is as yet no means of successfully treating patients suffering from all the symptoms of the disease. Neither has it been possible, despite great efforts, to develop a vaccine against AIDS.

Preventive measures

Since it is not possible to treat AIDS, **prevention is the most effective way of fighting this disease.** Observing preventive measures will stop the disease from spreading and prevent an AIDS epidemic which would threaten the whole of mankind.

Since AIDS is transmitted most frequently through sexual intercourse, the use of condoms (contraceptive sheaths) is recommended as a very effective measure.

In addition, the general principles of hygiene should be carefully observed, with a view to preventing the spread not only of AIDS but also of other infectious diseases.

The HIV-antibody test

It is now possible to have one's blood tested for antibodies against the HIV virus.

A person undergoing this test learns whether his/her blood has not been infected with the AIDS virus (test result = **negative**) or whether he/she has been infected with the HIV virus (test result = **positive**).

However, a positive result by no means indicates that the person in question has AIDS. A large proportion of those who are infected do not manifest any

symptoms of the disease. However, a small percentage of those infected do in fact subsequently manifest the symptoms.

On the other hand, anyone who is infected with the virus can, even if he himself/she herself does not show any symptoms of the disease and remains healthy, transmit the infection in others during sexual intercourse.

In view of the possible psychological stress which the test may cause, it should only be carried out after consulting someone whom one trusts (partner, doctor, counselling centre) and never in isolation. Care should also be taken to ensure that the test is carried out anonymously if the person undergoing the test so desires.

What to do

Readers who fear that they may be suffering from AIDS should first consult their family doctor. In addition, they can obtain information from the following institutions or undergo an (anonymous) blood test there:

- their local public health office;
- university hospitals.

or:

AIDS-Advisory Board of the city
and University of Frankfurt
univ. hospital, bldg. 68 ("Innere Medizin")
Sandhofstrasse
6000 Frankfurt/Main

Tel. 069/63016700 or 63016702

hotline mo-fri 8.30a.m.-3p.m. (or by appointment)

Anonymous AIDS-Advisory Board
of the city of München

Dachauer Strasse 90
8000 München 2

Tel. 089/5207-270

hotline mo-fri 8a.m.-12a.m./1p.m.-3p.m.

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