

**AIDS
INFO**

**What
we
know**

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

What is AIDS?

AIDS stands for »Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome« and is the medical name for a new infectious disease. The virus that can cause AIDS is known as HIV (Human Immuno Deficiency Virus).

The incubation period for AIDS is up to ten years, which means that the disease can appear up to ten 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 may then lead to infections and illnesses such as pneumonia (Pneumocystis carinii) or various forms of cancer (Kaposi's sarcoma) from which the patients concerned die.

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

The symptoms listed below do not apply only to cases of suspected AIDS, but to many infectious diseases. If you think that you have one of these symptoms there is no need to panic. However, if you observe several of the symptoms over an extended period of time, you should at least consult your family doctor: above normal temperature/fever; fatigue; diarrhoea; abnormal weight loss; swollen lymph nodes (on the throat or neck or in the armpits); perspiration and a dry cough; fungus infections of the mouth and throat.

The main groups affected

From the evidence available to date the following groups are affected most frequently by AIDS:

- homosexual and bisexual men;
- persons who intravenously inject themselves with drugs;
- sexual partners of the above-mentioned groups;
- new-born babies of infected mothers.

AIDS is now spreading beyond these groups, however.

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 needle sharing.

Haemophiliacs and recipients of blood transfusions are no longer regarded to be at risk, as it has been routine procedure since mid-1985 to test blood donors for an HIV-infection.

It is virtually impossible for the disease to be transmitted by hugging, caressing, kissing, coughing or sneezing, or through daily contacts such as shaking hands or using the same plates, glasses or clothes.

So far the disease has not been transmitted in schools, at work, in restaurants or swimming pools or when shopping, at social gatherings or when living with and looking after AIDS patients or persons with positive test results.

Medical treatment

There is as yet no means of successfully treating patients suffering from full blown AIDS.

Neither has it been possible so far, 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 the only effective measure.

In addition, 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 virus HIV.

This test should only be carried out when symptoms of the disease are present and – in view of the possible psychological stress involved – only 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.

Anyone undergoing this test learns whether his/her blood has been affected with the virus (test result = positive) or not (test result = negative). However, since in individual cases several months may pass after the virus has entered the body before the formation of antibodies is detectable, a definitive statement cannot be made on the basis of only one negative result.

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, that is, they do not become AIDS patients. However, a percentage of those infected may in fact subsequently manifest the symptoms.

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 to others during sexual intercourse.

Condoms provide effective protection.

What to do

If you suspect that you may be suffering from AIDS you should first consult your family doctor. Moreover, the AIDS relief organizations give advice and provide information on the institutions which carry out medical examinations and offer counselling services.

Counselling in English:

AIDS-Advisory Board of the city
and University of Frankfurt
univ. hospital, bldg. 68 ("Innere Medizin")
Sandhofstrasse
6000 Frankfurt/Main
Tel. 0 69/63 01 67 00 or 63 01 67 02
hotline mo-fri 8.30 a.m. - 3 p.m. (or by appointment)

AIDS-Hilfe Frankfurt e.V.
Eschersheimer Landstraße 9
6000 Frankfurt/Main 1
Tel. 0 69/59 01 98
fri 7 p.m. - 10 p.m.

Anonymous AIDS-Advisory Board
of the city of München
Dachauer Strasse 90
8000 München 2
Tel. 0 89/52 07-270
hotline mo-fri 8 a.m. - 12 a.m./1 p.m. - 3 p.m.

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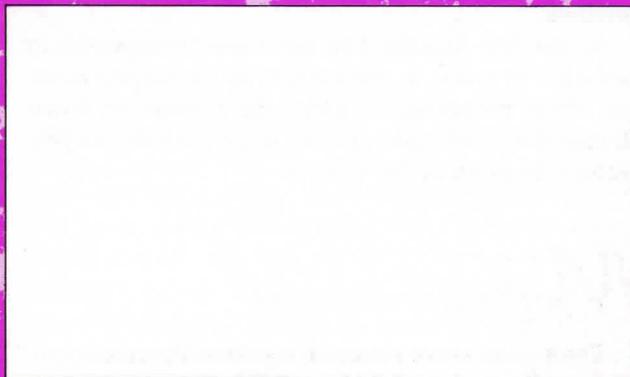


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