

# Aids

## What's it got to do with me?

To date, the only known way to control the spread of AIDS is through prevention. In order to prevent it, each individual must assume personal responsibility for their own lives and the state of their health. If you think AIDS information is for someone else, that it doesn't include you, then GOOD LUCK - - you are going to need it!!

On the other hand, armed with accurate information, you will be able to avoid behaviors that may put you at risk and, equally important, enable you to respond to people affected with the AIDS virus in a humanitarian and understanding way.

Let's look at the myths and the facts regarding AIDS and the methods of transmission:

### Myth:

"I've heard that the AIDS virus can be contracted from doorknobs, toilet seats, or from infected people who are coughing."

### Fact:

The AIDS virus is *fragile*! It is present in the blood, semen and/or vaginal fluids of infected persons and is spread when such fluids enter another person's bloodstream. Though the virus has been found to be present in other body secretions such as tears and saliva, the amounts present may be too small to transmit infection and no cases of AIDS have been contracted in this manner. There is NO EVIDENCE that AIDS can be transmitted through air, food and casual body contact.

### Transmission occurs through:

1. Sexual contact with an infected person.
2. Sharing needles or syringes with an infected person;
3. By transfusion or injection of infected blood or blood products. The Red Cross has been testing blood since November, 1985. Testing methods are highly sensitive and any blood found to be contaminated with the AIDS virus is discarded.
4. An infected mother who transmits the AIDS virus to her baby before or at birth, or after birth via breast milk.

### Myth:

"AIDS is a homosexual disease."

### Fact:

Any sexually active person who is not maintaining a mutually monogamous relationship with another non-infected person and does not take precautions in sexual encounters is at risk of contracting AIDS.

Although the gay community may have borne the brunt in suffering the initial onslaught of AIDS, it has been clearly established that the virus is indiscriminate. Heterosexual individuals are equally at risk of contracting AIDS.

## Reducing the Risk

### How can you protect yourself?

The following is a list of precautions to reduce the risk of contracting or spreading the AIDS virus.

- Total abstinence from sex or by maintaining a mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has not been exposed to the AIDS virus is the surest way to eliminate risk.

- Don't have sex with anyone whose past history and current health status is unknown to you. A person may test positive and be a carrier with no apparent symptoms of the AIDS virus. Research has found that a person may be a carrier for up to fifteen years without developing full-blown AIDS. It has been speculated that some carriers may never develop AIDS although they are capable of transmitting the virus to others.

- Don't share needles or syringes.

- Don't share toothbrushes, razors, or other personal effects that may be contaminated with blood.

- Exercise safe sex practices.

## What is Safe Sex?

Safe sex is any sexual practice which reduces the risk of transmission of the AIDS virus.

When participating in any sexual activity consider the following:

- Use a condom when involved in vaginal or anal intercourse, and in oral sex. Even the pre-ejaculatory fluid of males may contain the virus.

- Any oral involvement with the female sex should be considered a risk activity. Vaginal secretions can carry the AIDS virus and could reach the bloodstream.

- Avoid any activity that involves the insertion of the hands or fingers in the anal cavity.

- The virus has been found in urine. Contact should be avoided.

- Under no circumstances should sex toys such as dildoes, vibrators, etc., be shared.

- Any sexual activity that might involve exposure to blood or blood products should be considered high risk.

- Spermicides and lubricants containing nonoxonyl have been found to be effective against the AIDS virus in the laboratory and are known to be effective against other sexually transmitted diseases such as herpes, gonorrhea, and syphilis.

- Deep kissing (inserting the tongue into your partner's mouth) creates an exchange of saliva and should be considered low risk.

- Body massage and body-to-body rubbing are considered safe. There has been no evidence of the virus in perspiration.

- Mutual masturbation is considered a safe sex activity providing there are no breaks in the skin.

- The risk of contracting AIDS increases with the number of partners.

- Always set limits before you start. Establish with your partner which activities you will or will not engage in from the outset of any sexual encounter.

This information is presented in the hope that it will provide you with information by which to formulate decisions regarding sexual behavior. Sex is a personal matter and as such involves a personal choice. With regard to AIDS, the choices you make now can mean the difference between life and death - YOURS.

AIDS-NB has been established to provide education with regard to AIDS, its transmission and prevention, and to provide support to AIDS victims, their families and friends. Please call the Information Line if you have any questions at 1-800-561-4009.

Hours: Monday 7:30 - 10:30

Thursday 7:30 - 10:30

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