

AIDS WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

THUSITHA MALALASEKERA

Interviews

DR. GAMINI JAYAKURU

*Director - Anti - AIDS/STD Programme
and*

DR. MARCUS FERNANDO

Director - Health Education Bureau

AIDS is the final stage that results from an infection of HI virus. It is a condition which develops when the body's natural defensive mechanisms or the immune processes are not working properly. As a result infected people are more likely to get illnesses, infections and some forms of cancers which the body would normally be able to fight off easily. These illnesses can be serious or fatal.*

AIDS stand for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

Acquired - means that it's caught from someone or something as opposed to inherited.

Immune Deficiency - state where your body cannot defend itself against certain illnesses.

Syndrome - describes the varied signs and symptoms of illnesses that result from the infection.

AIDS patients develop serious infections in the digestive system, lungs, central nervous system, and skin. They also develop particular forms of cancer.

AIDS AND H.I. Virus

Aids is caused by a virus called Human Immunodeficiency Virus or HIV. Luc Montagnier of the Pasteur Institute of France isolated this Aids causing virus.

How is the HIV Passed on

Transmission of HI virus involves exposure to body fluids of an infected person. The virus has been isolated from various body fluids. The higher concentration has been found in blood, semen, vaginal secretions and cerebro - spinal fluid. HIV is found in lesser concentrations in body fluids such as saliva, tears, breast milk, urine and amniotic fluid.

AIDS is spread when blood, semen or vaginal secretions of an infected per-

son comes into contact with the blood of a healthy person.

There are three main ways by which the virus can be transmitted to another.

1. By intimate sexual contact

The most common way that the HI virus is spread is when a person has sexual intercourse with a person who is already carrying the virus in the body fluids. The virus can be passed on either in sexual intercourse between homosexuals, (from an infected man to a man through anal intercourse) or intercourse between a man and woman from an infected man to a woman and from an infected woman to a man.

2. By transfusion of infected blood and blood products

If the blood or blood products containing the H.I. virus is given to an uninfected person, then the blood or blood product receiver becomes infected with the H.I. virus. Transfusion

of unscreened blood is dangerous. Syringe, needles, knives, razor blades and piercing tools or any of the instrument used to cut, pierce or inject the body can contain blood of a person infected with the H.I. virus.

If such instruments are used with out proper sterilization, then the H.I. virus can be passed onto an uninfected person through these instruments.

Needles or syringes are a common mode of transmission of the HIV among intravenous drug users.

How is the AIDS Developed

Normally when you catch an infection, the body's immune mechanism is activated and it attacks the invader. Due to some reason or other when an H.I. virus enters the body this mechanism does not happen properly. There are a group of white blood cells called lymphocytes which recognize the intruder and orchestrate the body's defence mechanism.

The H.I. virus attacks the very lymphocytes, the T-helper cells or T-4

develop full blown AIDS the end stage of HIV infection.

During that period HIV infected person could undergo five phases described below.

i. Acute phase

The acute phase may occur 2-12 weeks after infection. Clinical manifestations of this phase are fever, sore throat, headache, night sweating, cough and sometimes enlargement of



3. By an infected pregnant women

To her unborn child during pregnancy or childbirth. Approximately 15-25% of infants born to infected mothers will be infected with the virus. There is a very slight risk of contacting Aids to a new-born through breast milk. But experts maintain benefits of breast-feeding outweigh this very minute risk.

cells, that normally would recognize it an alert the body's defences. When large number of the cells are attacked by H.I. virus the immune system breaks down and it leaves the body vulnerable to attacks from other infections, with fatal results. Though antibodies to the HI virus appear in the blood after 6-12 weeks (sometimes may take as long as 6-8 months) after infection. It may take 2-12 years to

Called upon to care for family members and friends with AIDS, women face physical, emotional and social stress.

lymph nodes. Often these features subside after about two weeks.

ii. The Latency phase

The characteristic of this phase is the absence of any illness. The infected individual shows no external signs of a disease.

iii. Persistent generalized lymphadenopathy phase

Lymph nodes longer than one cm in diameter are found in two or more sites other than groin for period of at least 3 months duration.

iv. AIDS related complex phase

Patients at this stage may have weight loss, malaise, fatigue, anorexia, watery diarrhoea, abdominal discomfort, fever, night sweating, headache, itching, lymphadenopathy and sometimes lesions of the skin and mucous membrane.

v. AIDS or the final phase

The most severe stage of the HIV infection. Full blown Aids shows severe and fatal opportunistic infections, rare forms of cancer, and neurological diseases.

Symptoms of AIDS

Symptoms of AIDS can be divided into two main categories as major signs and minor signs.

Major signs

*Weight loss of more than 10% of body weight within 1-2 months.

*Chronic diarrhoea for more than one month.

*Intermittent or constant fever for more than one month.

Minor signs

*Profound fatigue.

*Persistent cough or shortness of breath for more than one month.

*Generalised enlarged lymph nodes.

*Thrush in the mouth.

*Generalised pruritic dermatitis.

*Loss of appetite.

Most common such opportunistic infections are:

- Pneumocystis Carinii Pneumonia - A serious lung infection.
- Kaposi's Sarcoma - A cancerous tumour.
- B.Cell Lymphoma - A form of cancer.
- Tuberculosis - Can affect many organs of the body.
- Herpes Simplex - Viruses cause skin lesions around mouth or in genital or rectal area.
- Candidiasis or Thrush - Fungal infection commonly seen in mouth.
- Cryptosporidiosis - A protozoan disease causing severe diarrhoea.
- Cryptococcal Meningitis - Fungal infection of the meningeal layers of the brain.
- Encephalitis - Inflammation of the brain.



Needles and other skin-piercing instruments should be sterilised after each use. They should never be shared.

*Excessive sweating.

*Recurrent herpes zoster (shingles)

*Chronic progressive and disseminated herpes simplex infection.

Diagnosis of AIDS is considered if at least two of the major and one of the minor signs are present.

The manifestation of the disease varies widely from patient to patient and country to country. Some signs and symptoms are more common in certain parts of the world than in others.

At the same time these signs and symptoms could appear due to various other diseases. Eg: Swollen glands

could be a sign of glandular fever. Tiredness, fever, weight loss and cough may be more likely tuberculosis.

HIV is not transmitted through

*Touching, shaking hands, or hugging of a AIDS patient or a person infected with HI virus.

*Living, eating, studying, playing or swimming together with an Aids

*Sneezing or coughing by Aids patient or a person infected with HI virus.

*Bites of mosquitoes, ants etc., who have bitten an Aids patient or a person infected with HI virus.

*By donating blood.

Ways to Reduce the Risk of Getting AIDS

You are now aware the unsafe sexual

ing into contact with someone already infected.

*The HI virus could enter your body through vaginal - anal or oral intercourse. But the way you have sex might increase the risk. As an example Anal Intercourse is particularly risky. The walls of the back passage are delicate and likely to tear making it easier for the virus to pass from one person to another.

Therefore it is better to avoid sex with suspected persons.

*Avoid sex with person who have many partners such as prostitutes.

*If you suspect - use a condom from start to finish. It reduces the risk of getting virus.

*Sharing sex toys such as vibrators could be risky.

*There is no risk involved in masturbation or in partners caressing each other.

*Avoid sex with others or pregnancy if infected with HI virus.

*Avoid donating cornea or others body organs if you suspect your self.

*Use only sterilized or disposable devices that puncture the skin. This includes hyperdermic needles, syringes, ear piercing equipments or acupuncture needles.

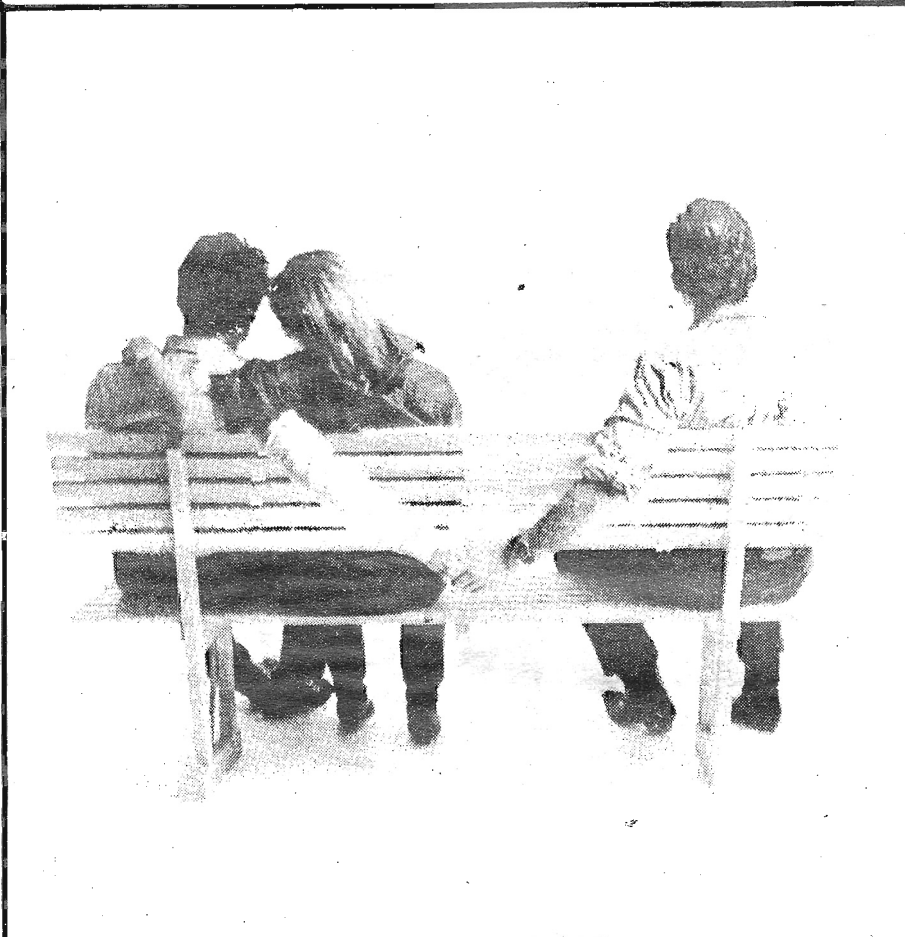
*The drug abuses, should avoid injection of drugs. But if you do continue to inject use your own set and never share.

*Sharing or mixing up of razors and tooth brushes should be avoided.

You can find out whether you are already infected or not.

Antibodies to the virus appear in the blood 6-12 weeks after infection.

There are special blood tests (ELISA/WESTERN BLOT) which detects these antibodies. If the test is positive it means that you have been



This Norwegian poster advises: "Men who have sex with men should have regular health checks" Express agree that AIDS prexcution messages aimed at bisexual men should compasise behaviour and avoid using the sexual labls: homosexual, heterosexual or bisexual.

patient or a person infected with HI virus.

*Sharing cups, plates, towels, bed-sheets, etc. with an Aids patient or a person infected with HI virus.

*Using toilets used by an Aids patient or a person infected with HI virus.

practices are the main cause for HIV infection/AIDS.

*Have sexual intercourse only with one faithful, uninfected, permanent partner.

*Reduce the number of sexual partners. The fewer sexual partners you have the less risk you have of com-