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What are the Facts about H.I.V. and AIDS

Transmission, Symptoms, Testing and Treatment

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Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is caused by the virus Human Immunodeficiency Virus (H.I.V.). H.I.V. can cause illnesses by breaking down the body's ability to fight infections. H.I.V. has been detected in the blood, semen, breast milk, and vaginal fluids of people with H.I.V. and all of these have been implicated in transmitting H.I.V.. People with H.I.V. remain infectious and can continue to infect other people throughout their life.

Transmission

H.I.V. is passed from one person to another by any of these body fluids entering the bloodstream of another person. H.I.V. is easily passed from one person to another when even a small amount of infected body fluids enters the blood stream of another person. It can be passed on through unprotected sex - anal, oral (in theory) and vaginal - and through sharing needles and syringes, needle stick accidents, and from a pregnant woman with H.I.V. to her foetus.

H.I.V. can enter your bloodstream through mucous membranes or tiny abrasions or cuts on your vagina, penis, anus, and in theory, your mouth and hands.

Having a S.T.D. can cause inflammation, open lesions and breaks in the skin, which allow the H.I.V. virus to pass into the bloodstream more easily.

Symptoms

Within six weeks after infection some people have an acute flu-like illness with fever, night sweats, loss of appetite, nausea, aches and pains, sore throat, headache and diarrhoea. After this, most people don't develop any symptoms for many months and even years after infection. Most people with H.I.V. look and feel healthy even though they are infectious. The following symptoms can occur early in H.I.V. infection but can also be the signs of other viral infections:

- significant and persistent weight loss;
- increasing and persistent tiredness;
- fever and night sweats;
- swollen lymph glands; and
- persistent diarrhoea.

H.I.V. infection progresses over a long period of time and H.I.V. related illnesses develop which include secondary cancers, brain disorders and other infections.

Testing

A blood sample is taken to be tested for H.I.V. antibodies. If this test is positive, it means that you have been infected with H.I.V. However, if the result is negative, this does not necessarily mean that you are not infected with H.I.V. It takes from four weeks to three months after infection for most people's bodies to make the antibodies to H.I.V. (the window period). During this time, the H.I.V. antibody test will be negative, but you may still have H.I.V.

Deciding to have an H.I.V. test is not an easy decision. Pre-test counselling is essential so that you are informed about what your options are and to make sure that you are given all the information about what positive and negative results really mean. Getting an H.I.V.+ result will have very profound effects on your lifestyle and may affect your decisions about working and other jobs, your relationships, your family, having children, travelling etc. Make sure that you talk to a counsellor before you decide to go ahead and get tested for H.I.V.

Treatment

There are a few medically prescribed treatments for H.I.V. infection including Azidothymidine (AZT), Didanosine (ddI), Dideoxycytidine (ddC) and other prescription drugs. Some of these are only available if you are participating in a trial of the drug. There are also a number of treatments available for H.I.V. related illnesses. Good nutrition, meditation, a range of alternative treatments and balanced

exercise programs are all recommended. However, as yet there is no known cure and no vaccine for H.I.V.

The Gender Centre is committed to raising awareness of H.I.V. / AIDS issues in the transgender community. We will report on H.I.V. / AIDS treatments and developments.

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The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.