

Truth

OR CONSEQUENCE

THE STORY OF HIV/AIDS



Women's Ministries Department
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

What is **HIV/AIDS?**

**HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a virus that causes
AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome)**

FACT:

**HIV by itself is not an illness and does not instantly lead to AIDS.
A person with the HIV virus can live a healthy life for several
years before he/she develops AIDS.**

What is AIDS:

**Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome is a health condition
that results from the body having contracted the HIV virus
and leaves the body vulnerable to life threatening diseases.**

Facts about HIV/AIDS

- AIDS is an **incurable but preventable** disease.
- **All people**, including children, are at risk for HIV/AIDS.
- Everyone needs **information and education** about the disease.
- The risk of getting HIV through sex can be reduced if people **don't have sex outside marriage**.
- **Girls are especially vulnerable** to HIV infection and **need support** to protect themselves and be protected from unwanted and unsafe sex.
- Parents and teachers can help young people protect themselves from HIV/AIDS by **talking with them** about abstinence and how to avoid getting and spreading the disease.
- HIV infection can be **passed from mother to her child** during pregnancy or childbirth or through breastfeeding.
- People who have a sexually transmitted infection (STI) are at **greater risk** of getting HIV and of spreading HIV to others.

How AIDS progresses

- **Early symptoms of HIV infection:**

Some people have a flu-like illness within a month or two after being infected with the virus. This may include fever, headache, tiredness, enlarged lymph nodes. During this period, people are very infectious, and HIV is present in large quantities in genital fluids.

- **Symptoms may not appear for 10 years or more after HIV is contracted.**
- **During this period the virus is actively multiplying, infecting healthy cells, and killing cells of the immune system.**
- **For many people the first sign of HIV infection is swollen glands of lymph nodes that may be enlarged for more than three months.**

How HIV/AIDS is Transmitted

- Unprotected sex
- Sharing of needles
- Improperly sterilized hospital tools
- Transfusions of unscreened blood
- Infected woman to her child during pregnancy childbirth or breastfeeding



How HIV/AIDS is NOT transmitted

- It is not transmitted by causal contact such as shaking hands or hugging
- It is not transmitted by air, water, food, or insect bites



Education

HIV/AIDS

- It is very important that young people understand the risks of HIV/AIDS.
- Parents, teachers, health workers, guardians, and persons in church leadership need to warn young people about the risk of HIV/AIDS, other STI's, and unplanned pregnancy.
- Discussion groups are one good way to educate the youth.
- Young people need to know that there is no vaccine and no cure for HIV/AIDS. They need to understand that prevention is their only protection against this disease.
- They need to be empowered to refuse sex.
- Children and adults need to know that they cannot contract HIV from ordinary social contact with children or adults with HIV.
- People must be encouraged to give support and care to those living with HIV/AIDS and their families.

Avoid Getting HIV/AIDS

- Because there is no vaccine for HIV the only way to prevent infection by the virus is to avoid behaviors that put a person at risk of infection such as sharing needles and unprotected sex.
- Abstinence from sex is the only safe way to avoid contracting HIV during intercourse.
- Persons with STI's are more susceptible to contracting HIV.



Effects of HIV/AIDS

social, emotional, mental

Social problems - many HIV/AIDS patients are still rejected by family, friends, and coworkers at a time when they need people's support and understanding.

Emotional Problems - Depression, mood swings, feelings of anger and sadness are common to someone with HIV/AIDS.

Mental problems - During the latter stages of HIV/AIDS a person may suffer from a degenerative neurological condition which may cause loss of coordination, confusion, memory loss, and impaired thought processes.



Women and HIV/AIDS

- At the end of 2002 **19.2 million women were living with HIV/AIDS.** This is 50 percent of the 38.6 million adults living with HIV/AIDS.
- More than 90 percent of all adolescent and adult HIV infections have resulted from heterosexual intercourse. **Women are particularly vulnerable to heterosexual transmission of HIV** due to substantial mucosal exposure to seminal fluids.
- Women suffer from the same complications of AIDS that men suffer from but they also suffer from **gender-specific problems of HIV,** such as recurrent vaginal yeast infection, severe pelvic inflammatory disease which increases their risk of cervical cancer.

Women and HIV/AIDS

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- Some women-specific symptoms of HIV infection are -
 - vaginal yeast infections
 - severe herpes simplex virus ulcerations
 - genital ulcers
 - genital warts which can lead to cervical cancer
 - pelvic inflammatory disease menstrual irregularities.
- One study showed that **women are 33% more likely than men to die of AIDS**. The reason is that women may be less likely than men to be diagnosed early, which may account for shorter survival times.
- It was also speculated that **women have poorer access to or use of health care resources** as compared to men.

Women and HIV/AIDS

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- Girls are especially vulnerable to HIV infection. **In many countries HIV rates are higher among teenage girls than boys.**

This is because:

- young girls may not understand the risk or may be unable to protect themselves from sexual advances
- their vaginal membranes are thinner and more susceptible to infection than those of mature women
- they are sometimes targeted by older men who seek young women with little or no sexual experience because they are less likely to be infected.

Women and **HIV/AIDS**

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- **Other symptoms of HIV/AIDS (often experienced months to years before the onset of AIDS) include -**
 - fatigue, weight loss,
 - frequent fevers and sweats,
 - skin problems,
 - persistent or frequent yeast infections (oral or vaginal),
 - persistent skin rashes or flaky skin,
 - pelvic inflammatory disease in women that does not respond to treatment
 - short-term memory loss
 - some people develop frequent and severe herpes infections that cause mouth, genital, or anal sores, or a painful nerve disease called shingles.

What to do if you think you have HIV/AIDS



Contact a health worker or an HIV/AIDS center to receive confidential counseling and testing.

Test For HIV/AIDS

- ELISA test and Western Blot test are most common
- A person may still be infected with HIV even if the test is negative and will need to be tested periodically



Treatment for HIV/AIDS

- There is no conclusive treatment to eliminate HIV from the body.
- However, over the past decade, researches have developed powerful drugs that can slow the virus from multiplying.
- These drugs are very expensive and many infected people are unable to access them.
- These drugs do not permanently cure HIV but has resulted in a decline in AIDS-related deaths.
- There are serious side effects to some of these drugs that have concerned many.
- More than a dozen HIV vaccines are currently being tested. To date none have proved effective.

**Information taken from
You and AIDS Organization, Health Edco, UNICEF
Facts for Life document, NIAID Fact Sheets.**