

HIV/AIDS: Prevention, Treatment and Hope

It is estimated that over a million people in the US are living with HIV, with another million or so living with AIDS. These diseases are preventable and treatable with the right knowledge.

What are HIV and AIDS?

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus is a disease which causes AIDS, or Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome. A person with HIV can go years without develop-

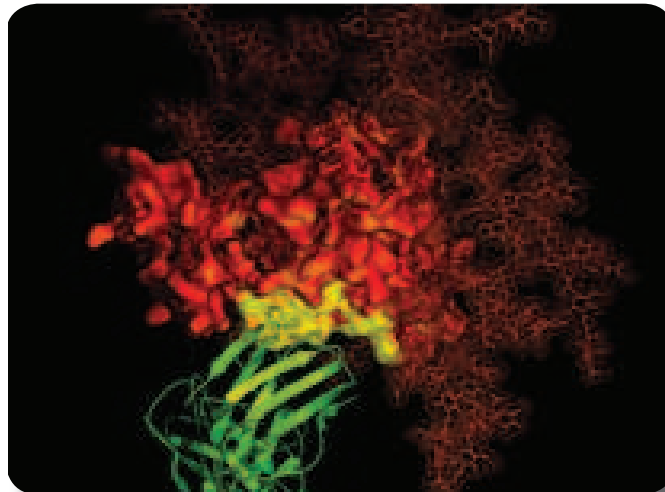
ing anything more than occasional flu-like symptoms, or may even show no signs at all. During this time, HIV destroys and greatly weakens the body's immune system. By the final stage, the infected individual develops AIDS, in which the body's defenses are so damaged that they become susceptible to numerous other diseases and some forms of cancer. The time it takes to develop AIDS varies from person to person and can be prolonged with treatment.

How Does HIV Spread?

The virus is contracted mostly through unprotected sex. However, having multiple sex partners or the presence of other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) can increase the risk of infection during sex. Unprotected oral sex can also be a risk for HIV transmission, but it is a much lower risk than anal or vaginal sex.

Sharing needles, syringes, rinse water, or other equipment used to prepare illicit drugs for injection.

HIV DOES NOT spread through air or



water; insects such as mosquitoes; saliva, tears, or sweat; casual contact such as a handshake or sharing food; and closed-mouth, "social" kissing.

What Can I Do?

Know your HIV status. Everyone between the ages of 13 and 64 should be tested for HIV at least once. If you are at increased risk for HIV, you should be tested for HIV at least once a year.

Abstain from sexual activity or be in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with an uninfected partner.

Limit your number of sex partners. The fewer partners you have, the less likely you are to encounter someone who is infected with HIV or another STD.

Use latex condoms constantly and correctly. They're highly effective at preventing transmission of HIV and some other sexually transmitted diseases. Get tested and treated for STDs and insist that your partners do too.

Do not inject drugs. If you inject drugs, you should get counseling and treatment to stop or reduce your drug use. If you cannot stop injecting drugs, use clean needle.

Participate in risk reduction programs. Programs exist to help people make healthy decisions,

such as negotiating condom use or discussing HIV status. The health department can refer you to programs in your area. Even if you're uninfected, you can be helped. Learn more at <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/default.htm>

HIGHLIGHTS

The Miami-Dade County Health Department has an HIV/AIDS program dedicated to serving individuals with HIV/AIDS. Among the services offered are testing, education in prevention, assistance in risk reduction, counseling, disease surveillance, and patient care services.

The main number to call is 305-470-6999. To register for the AIDS Drug Assistance Program visit : <http://www.dadehealth.org/hiv/HIVassistance.asp>

Additional contacts include the HIV/AIDS Program Coordinator (305-470-6974), Prevention Services (305-470-6942), and Counseling and Testing Services (305-470-6960)

For more health topics, visit www.dadehealth.org/atoz/atoz.asp