

HIV and What You Should Know About It

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Abstract

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus, and this infection is human because the virus causes diseases only in human being. Once this virus is present and active, the immune system which is responsible for protecting the body becomes weak and just like other virus, HIV is caused by small organism (microorganism) that infect living things and uses them to make copies of itself. Without treatment, HIV infection might progress to an advance stage called AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

Keywords: *Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV); Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)*

According to UNAIDS, approximately there are 36.9 million people worldwide living with HIV/AIDS in 2017, of these 1.8 million were children (< 15 years old). An estimated 1.8 million individuals worldwide became newly infected with HIV in 2017, about 5,000 new infections per day, which includes 180,000 children (< 15 years). Most of these children live in sub-Saharan Africa and were infected by their HIV positive mothers during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding. The highest numbers of people living with HIV are in low and middle-income countries.

HIV was believed by scientists to have originated from non-human primates called Chimpanzees, in central and West Africa. The Chimpanzee version of immunodeficiency virus which most likely was transmitted to humans and mutated into HIV when humans hunted Chimpanzees for meat and came into contact with their infected blood. Overtime, this virus continued to spread from Africa to the other part of the world. Being the most leading cause of pandemic disease, HIV remains one of the deadliest most especially when it gets to the advance stage of AIDS. This Virus can be contacted through different ways which include, moving of blood semen or vagina fluids from an infected person to another through sexual contact, sharing of infected needles or sharp objects, injection of blood through blood transfusions, accidental needle stick injuries, and infected blood splash on an open wound or from mother to child during birth.

Key populations of groups who are at increased risk of contracting the virus include: men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs, people in prisons and other closed settings, sex workers and their clients, transgender people etc. However, the widely spread of this infection is sexual intercourse without any form of protection i.e. the use of condom or taking antiretroviral drugs. HIV makes it difficult for the body to fight off infection, when an individual is infected with this virus, the person may get infections otherwise known as opportunistic infections e.g. tuberculosis. Opportunistic infections are caused as a result of damaged immune system thereby leading to a number of serious illnesses. People that are yet to be infected by the virus but has been exposed to it can prevent transmission by Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) which involves taking antiretroviral medicines after being potentially exposed to the virus, thereby preventing one to become infected. PEP is actually meant for emergency situations and must be done within 72 hours after recent or possible exposure to HIV.

However, it is important to clear the thoughts of some individual that believe HIV can be contracted by mere touching/rubbing of one body against another. Note; HIV cannot be spread through sweat, urine, or casual contact like hugging, mosquito/pests, sharing of drinking glasses, sharing toilets or shaking hands with infected individual. The risk of spreading this virus through deep kissing in which large amount of saliva are exchanges is low, therefore HIV cannot be spread through kissing. Well, several factors may increase the risk through kissing if the infected individual has wounds in the mouth or vaginal or on the penis, bleeding gums, or oral contact with menstrual blood and the presence of other sexually transmitted disease (STDs).

Even though this deadly virus seems to be easily contacted, there are still ways one can stay out of its radar even while leaving among the infected people. In order to reduce the risk of contracting this viral infection, protection like condoms should be used when engaging in anal or vaginal sex, PEP treatment should be done after being exposed to the virus, disposal of sharp objects appropriately and avoid the use of objects that are contaminated by blood [1-6].

Conclusion

In conclusion, abstinence is the only 100% effective HIV prevention option. Abstinence includes being extremely careful and staying away from anything or act that may increase the chances of been infected. Above all it is crucial for every living individual to know their status, not yesterday or tomorrow, but TODAY. Constantly go for checkup, not only for your own good but also for your loved ones.

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