

# AIDS

◆ CONCERNING YOUR HEALTH ◆

## WHAT IS AIDS?

AIDS stands for acquired immunodeficiency syndrome. It's a disease caused by a virus (HIV) that can destroy the body's ability to fight off illness. AIDS by itself doesn't kill. Other infections (such as pneumonia, cancer and other illnesses) invade the body, and these diseases can kill.

At the present time, *there is no known cure for AIDS, and no vaccine that prevents the disease.* AIDS is a very serious disease.

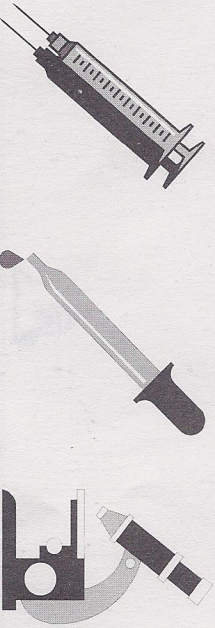
## HOW IS AIDS SPREAD?

There are four main ways that the AIDS virus is spread:

- 1) Having sex with an infected person.
- 2) Sharing drug needles and syringes with an infected person.
- 3) A woman infected with the AIDS virus who becomes pregnant or breastfeeds can pass the virus to the baby.
- 4) Injection of contaminated blood products.

There is no risk in donating blood since new equipment is used for each donor. At one time blood transfusions could have transmitted the disease. Blood is tested very carefully now before it is used for transfusions so the risk is greatly decreased.

The AIDS virus is hard to get and is easily avoided. It comes primarily from sexual intercourse or sharing of drug needles. You don't get it from the usual social contact with people in school or at work. You don't get it from doorknobs, a telephone, or from a toilet seat. You don't get it from going to school where a student has it. Precaution should be taken when sharing eating utensils—you can get infected with other viruses from sharing these things.



## HOW CAN I TELL IF I HAVE AIDS?

The only way to tell if you have the AIDS virus is by having a blood test. You can have the virus without having the disease itself or without feeling ill. You can transmit the disease to others without realizing that you are infected. Once infected, you will remain infected for life.

Some of the common symptoms are: unexplained persistent fatigue, fever, weight loss, swollen glands, persistent diarrhea, unusual and persistent skin problems. The symptoms can vary from very mild to very severe. Remember, you can be infected and not have any symptoms and still spread the disease to others!

## WHAT IF YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO HAS AIDS?

At the beginning of the AIDS epidemic many had little sympathy for people with AIDS. The feeling was that somehow people from certain groups "deserved" their illness. We are fighting a disease, not people. Those who are already afflicted are sick people and need our care as do all sick people. A person with AIDS needs more support and love. This help might be in the form of picking up food at the market and sitting with the person a while. Show your friend that there is a better life to come.

You don't need to worry about getting AIDS from everyday contact but you should wear rubber gloves when blood is present. Prevention of the spread of AIDS is the only way to eliminate the disease. Avoid promiscuous sex and illegal drugs. AIDS among women is increasing steadily. You can get AIDS from one sexual experience. You increase the risk greatly by having sex with multiple partners. Reduce the risk by using condoms. *Do not share IV needles.*

There is no one who is immune to the disease. The best prevention, however, is to follow the cautions as outlined and to refrain from any activity which would place a person at risk.

