



Just the Facts...

HIV/AIDS

Definition and Terms

- Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) - a disease in which the body's immune system breaks down.
- Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) - the virus that causes AIDS.
- HIV-Related Illness - conditions such as thrush and night sweats that HIV-infected people develop as their immune systems become impaired. Other examples are recurrent pneumonia and invasive cervical cancer.
- Opportunistic Infection - illnesses that occur when the immune system breaks down. The most common are *Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia*, *Cytomegalovirus (CMV)*, and *Mycobacterium avium complex (MAC)*.

Transmission of HIV

HIV lives in body fluids: blood, semen, vaginal fluid, and breast milk. Infection occurs when a body fluid containing HIV enters the body of an uninfected person. The four main ways that HIV is transmitted are *sexual intercourse, sharing needles* (drug, vitamin, steroid, tattoo, or any other type that pierces the skin) *with an infected person, transfusion of infected blood or blood products, and being born to or ingesting breast milk from an infected woman.* All forms of sexual intercourse (vaginal, anal, and oral) can transmit HIV from a man to a woman, from a woman to a man, or from a man to a man.

HIV cannot be transmitted by everyday contact with people at home, work, or school; by social kissing or hugging; from coughing or sneezing; from using phones, toilets, or utensils; or from donating blood.

Diagnosis

HIV is diagnosed by a blood test. Once a person is exposed to the virus, it can take from 3 weeks to 6 months for the virus to show up in a routine HIV blood test. Persons can transmit the virus before the test for HIV is positive. AIDS is diagnosed by the appearance of an HIV-related illness or an opportunistic infection.

Developing AIDS

HIV can remain in the body for ten years or longer without causing symptoms of infection. People who do not have symptoms look and feel healthy. They may not know that they are HIV-positive, unless they have been tested. Once the virus starts to breakdown the immune system, the person is said to have AIDS and will develop HIV-related illnesses and/or opportunistic infections.

AIDS is the 17th leading cause of death in the United States. It ranks 9th among ages 15-24, 6th among ages 25-34, and 5th among ages 35-44. Over 448,060 people have died from AIDS. (See Reference 1.) There is no cure for AIDS; however, better drugs for suppressing the spread of the virus in the body and more effective treatments for opportunistic infections are being developed.

Army Policy Regarding HIV and AIDS

Since 1985, the Army has conducted an ongoing program of screening candidates as well as active and reserve soldiers for HIV. According to Army Regulation (AR) 600-110, (see Reference 2), all active duty soldiers, will be routinely tested at least biennially. Soldiers are tested initially with the enzyme linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) test which is followed by the immunoelectrophoresis (Western Blot) test if the initial test is positive.

The regulation states that HIV-infected active-duty soldiers, including Active Guard/Reserve, will be permanently limited to duty within the continental United States. All active duty and reserve soldiers scheduled for overseas deployments or temporary duty exceeding 179 days must be tested for HIV infection within the 6 months prior to departure date.

Preventing Infection

HIV infection is *totally preventable* by:

- Abstaining from sexual intercourse.
- Being in a long-term monogamous relationship (both partners are faithful and have been tested negative or have had no other risk behaviors).
- Not using injectable drugs.

The risk of HIV infection can be *reduced* by:

- Using latex condoms for any form of sexual intercourse (oral, anal, or vaginal).
- Restricting sexual expression to activities other than intercourse.
- Making sure friends and family have accurate information about HIV exposure.

References

1. *CDC HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report, Dec 2000, Year-end edition, Vol. 12, No.2.*
2. AR 600-110, *Identification, Surveillance, and Administration of Personnel Infected with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)*, 1 June 1996.
3. *Leading Causes of Death, National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS)*
<http://webapp.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/leadcaus.html>