

AIDS

Aids is a contagious, infectious disease caused by the HIV virus, or human immune deficiency virus, which is **transmitted through sexual relations and blood**, from those who are infected or sero-positive (HIV positive).

As with hepatitis B, this virus penetrates through lesions on the skin, whether minute or not, or through the mucous membranes of the genitals and mouth. The latter are easily penetrated by the virus, even if intact.

The risk of contagion is lower than the hepatitis B virus, yet, **this disease is much more dangerous, and usually ends in death for the infected individual**. No vaccine exists for the prevention of Aids.

Aids became known at the beginning of the 1980's and is a disease that is still spreading. At the end of the year 2002, approximately 42 million people worldwide became infected or sick from Aids, of which more than 28 million only in sub-Saharan region of Africa. In this region of the world, the virus is, above all, transmitted through sexual contact. The result is a very high number of infected or HIV positive women, which consequently results in a high number of children who are already infected at birth.

This situation is increasingly critical due to the spread of other infectious diseases, especially tuberculosis, which favors the onset of Aids.

HOW DOES AIDS MANIFEST ITSELF?

The HIV virus attacks the immune cells, which act as a defence against infections.

Initially, the virus usually does not give rise to clinical symptoms, and the only sign of infection is represented by the presence of anti-HIV antibodies in the blood (seropositivity). Only in certain cases can the HIV infection determine an acute sickness lasting 1-2 weeks, which arises after a few weeks or a few months after contagion. The symptoms, characterized by fever and swelling of the lymph glands of the neck, regress spontaneously, without the need for therapy.

HIV immune deficiency then progresses gradually, usually after a long period of time (months / years) when clearly evident, characterized by varied clinical reports related to the acquired increasing sensibility of infection by germs and viruses, even when normally not very pathogenic (*n.b.* capable of producing disease), and to an increasing susceptibility to particular types of tumors.

HOW TO REDUCE SPREADING AIDS

Aids prevention is mainly based on the use of correct behavior.

However, promiscuous sexual behavior (ex. having more than one partner at a time), occasional sex without the use of condoms, and sharing needles must absolutely be avoided.

If you know you are HIV positive:

- immediately inform your partner, and insist on using condoms during sexual contact or intercourse: remember that the risk of contagion is greater from men to women than from women to men;
- use only your own toothbrush, nail scissors, razors, and any other manicure cutting tool;
- if you use needles for medication or drugs, always dispose of the needles properly so that others do not come into contact with them;
- if you are pregnant, inform your gynecologist so that preventive measures, which are already known to be efficient, can be taken to protect the child you are carrying.
- Rely upon a specialist, take all necessary tests, and follow all cures recommended.

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For more information contact:
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