



**Chapter 1:
Healthy
Bodies**

HIV and AIDS

**Positive Women's
Network***

Exclusively addresses women and HIV.

www.pwnetwork.org

**POSITIVE LIVING
FRASER VALLEY***

Bridget: (604) 850-6639

www.mcc.org

YouthCO AIDS Society*

A youth-driven organization working with BC youth to reduce vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis.

www.youthco.org

Healing Our Spirit*

BC Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Society

www.healingourspirit.org/

**BC Persons with AIDS
Society***

www.bcpwa.org/

**Fraser Valley Youth
Society***

Support for gay, lesbian and transgendered teens.

www.fraseryouth.com

AIDS Vancouver*

www.aidsvancouver.org/

BC Ministry of Health*

www.gov.bc.ca/health

PLANETAHEAD.CA*

A fun site on sexual health!

MYTHS, STIGMA & REALITY



What is the Difference Between HIV and AIDS?

HIV is an acronym that stands for **Human Immunodeficiency Virus**. HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. It attacks the immune system, which is what protects our bodies from illness. This means people with HIV/AIDS are more vulnerable to germs that other people are able to fight off. It is possible to be HIV Positive without having AIDS—some people do not acquire AIDS for many years after being infected with HIV. There is no cure for HIV/AIDS.

HIV can be transmitted by:

- ◆ Unsterilized Equipment from sharing needles or getting a tattoo or piercing.
- ◆ Unprotected Sex where bodily fluids from an infected person (semen, vaginal fluid, blood or breast milk) enter another's bloodstream via cuts, tears, fissures (small tears) or receptor cells.
- ◆ From Mother to Infant (through birth or breastfeeding)

HIV is NOT transmitted by:

- ◆ Hugging, Kissing or Shaking Hands
- ◆ Coughing or Sneezing
- ◆ Swimming Pools, Water Fountains or Shared Utensils/ Cups/Glasses, etc.
- ◆ Mosquitoes or Giving Blood

AIDS is an acronym for **Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome**. There is no vaccine to prevent HIV/AIDS and no cure once you are infected. People are first infected with HIV, and when the body is no longer able to fight off infection, they will be diagnosed as having AIDS. People who die from HIV/AIDS do not die from the disease itself, rather, they die because their immune system is unable to fight off even minor infections or common illnesses. Even the common cold or flu is serious to someone with a low immune system.

In 2002, Health Canada predicted there were 56,000 Canadians living with HIV or AIDS and that 30% of these people were not aware they had the disease. This number has increased significantly since 2002. Nearly 1/3 of people who have HIV don't know— Get tested!

The Stigma around HIV & AIDS

Stigma means "the shame or disgrace attached to something that is considered socially unacceptable".



Prejudice means "an adverse judgment or opinion formed beforehand or without knowledge or examination of the facts."

Unfortunately, people suffering from HIV/AIDS are often stigmatized and face prejudice from peers and the public. Negative comments can make them feel ashamed and embarrassed of their illness. People who are stigmatized are often teased, rejected, isolated, and discriminated against. This can result in many unnecessary negative experiences throughout their daily lives. Consider your own views of HIV/AIDS and how the words you use can either help alleviate or fuel prejudice and stigma.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Abbotsford, Mission, Ridge Meadows:

www.mentoringworks.ca



Big Brothers Big Sisters

Abbotsford • Mission • Ridge Meadows

Precautions to Avoid HIV/AIDS Transmission

- ◆ **Protect Yourself.** Get yourself tested if you have taken risks that may lead to HIV infection. If you are pregnant and suspect you may have the HIV virus, ask a doctor to test you to avoid passing the virus on to your newborn during delivery.
- ◆ **Never Have Unprotected Sex.** The best way to prevent AIDS is not to engage in sexual activities that involve the exchange of bodily fluids. Abstinence (not having sex) is the best way to stay safe. If you are having sex, use a latex or polyurethane condom and reduce your number of partners to prevent contracting HIV and other STI's. If you are victim of a sexual assault or rape, see a doctor immediately to get tested.
- ◆ **Never Share Needles** with a friend or use a needle that has been used already, whether you are testing your blood sugar or doing illegal drugs. Make sure equipment is sterile when getting a tattoo or piercing. Go to a reputable business - your life is worth the extra money.

Although HIV is a very serious, infectious disease that can be deadly, it is not transmitted through casual contact.

It is important to treat people with HIV/AIDS like anyone else — with respect. People should not be afraid to shake hands, swim in the same pool, or sit near those with HIV/AIDS. Sometimes people show prejudice toward those who are HIV Positive, by making judgements about their character or ethics, because they do not understand enough about HIV/AIDS to have accurate information. Making assumptions about the personality or ethics of a person with HIV/AIDS is like making assumptions about somebody when they have the flu. Not a fair judgement, is it?

People with HIV or AIDS may tire easily, and may be more vulnerable to diseases like cancer, tuberculosis, and infections. The infections associated with HIV/AIDS are called “opportunistic” since they take advantage of the body's weakened immune system. Although people with HIV/AIDS may need to miss work occasionally, as with any serious illness, they should not be considered lazy or unable to keep a job. People with HIV/AIDS are important contributing members of society and should be treated with the same dignity and respect everyone deserves. If you want to do your part to alleviate prejudice, make sure you don't whisper about people behind their backs or make assumptions about them. Try researching HIV/AIDS to learn more about it. Educate your friends and family. Start a campaign to raise awareness about people with HIV/AIDS, or register in an event like the Walk for Life to raise money and awareness for HIV/AIDS Awareness in your community.

HIV/AIDS Does Not Discriminate



The World Health Organization tells us that 16,000 people worldwide are infected by HIV every single day. Two of the highest risk groups for HIV Infection in Canada are

Aboriginal Peoples and women, but Canadian men and children are also affected. The Public Health Agency of Canada tells us that several hundred Canadian children are currently living with HIV/AIDS, and many more have lost a parent to the disease. All of us are at risk of getting the HIV virus so we need to take proper precautions at all times. The idea that only certain types of people are affected is a myth fueled by misinformation, ignorance, fear, and media sensationalism.

TIP: Remember that birth control and spermicides do not kill the HIV Virus. Always use a latex condom (or polyurethane if you are allergic to latex). It is a good idea to be tested for HIV and other diseases before having sex with a new partner, and make sure your partner does the same.



Health and Hygiene

Following a few basic hygiene rules relating to safer sex can assist in HIV/AIDS prevention. Always use a condom when engaging in sexual activity.

Numerous researchers (eg. From the University of Illinois, John Hopkins University, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and the University of Washington) have demonstrated that circumcising males may cut their risk of acquiring HIV via sex by fifty percent. This is because there are receptor cells in the foreskin of the penis which facilitate the transmission of HIV. However, this should not be a major cause of alarm for uncircumcised males in Canada. As long as people practice careful hygiene in combination with condom use, uncircumcised Canadians should not be at a considerably greater risk for HIV/AIDS than their circumcised counterparts.



The Role of Poverty and Lack of Education in HIV/AIDS

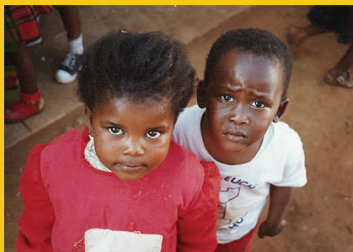
There is a **misperception** that third world countries (like some in Africa) have higher rates of HIV/AIDS because their people are more promiscuous (have sex with a lot of different people). However, a British study demonstrated that only two thirds of single men and women in Africa were sexually active, compared to three quarters of single people in developed countries like Canada, Britain or the United States. So why the reason for the disproportionate rates of infection?

1. **Lack of Education.** Many young people do not have the knowledge necessary to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS. They are not taught about HIV Prevention and the risk factors (eg. shared needles, unprotected sex) that can lead to infection.
2. **Lack of Equality.** Women in less developed countries often have fewer rights than Canadian women, so women may not be given a choice when their partner decides whether or not to use a condom. Young girls often are married to older men and thus begin engaging in sexual activity at a younger age. Girls are also at high-risk of rape and sexual exploitation.
3. **Extreme Poverty.** Couples may not be able to afford condoms, clean needles may not be available, and they might live in unhygienic conditions. Women and girls may have limited options and resort to survival sex work, often engaging in riskier sexual activity in order to fulfill their most basic needs for food and shelter.
4. **Lack of Proper Medical Care.** Medical care in Africa is not as good as medical care in Canada, so pregnant women with HIV are at greater risk of passing the disease on to their babies. In Canada, a woman with HIV may have her baby via a cesarean section (where the doctor makes an incision in the woman's abdomen to remove the baby) to lower the risk of transmitting the virus to her infant during a natural vaginal delivery. This procedure may not be available in third world countries. Poor medical care also means infected individuals have a significantly shorter life span than their Canadian counterparts.

Did you Know?

- ◆ Of the 5 million new infections recorded in 2005, 3.2 million (64%) were in sub-Saharan Africa.
- ◆ December 1st is World AIDS Day—a day to raise awareness and understanding of HIV and AIDS.
- ◆ There are approximately 33.2 million people in the world living with HIV/AIDS right now.

These statistics are depressing, but we can help by teaching our friends and family about HIV/AIDS and the importance of advocating for proper care and education of others.

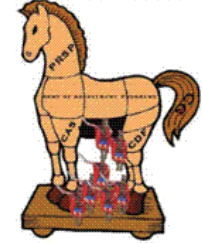


It's important to note that these same issues (poverty, lack of education, sexual inequality, etc.) can also play a role in the spread and treatment of HIV/AIDS here in Canada. For instance, many Canadians do not seek HIV/AIDS treatment, in part due to financial constraints. Many couples are also unable to openly discuss safe sex practices.

HOW HIV WORKS IN THE BODY

HIV is an example of a **blood born pathogen**, a microorganism that lives in the bloodstream and can cause disease. Hepatitis B and C are also examples of blood born pathogens.

TROJAN HORSE



It might be helpful to compare the way HIV infects the body to the legend of The Trojan Horse.

In Ancient Times, a war between the Greeks and the Trojans had dragged on for 10 years with no end in sight. The Greeks believed the Trojans had kidnapped the most beautiful woman in the world, a Greek girl named Helen of Troy, and they wanted her back! The Greeks knew they were not strong enough to conquer the powerful Trojan army, so they decided to use trickery instead of force to win the battle. They built a large wooden horse and left it outside the gates of Troy, then sailed away in their ships. The Trojans assumed the Greeks had surrendered, and dragged the present inside the security of their own protective walls. Little did the Trojans know that several Greek warriors were hiding inside the giant wooden horse! In the dead of night, they snuck out from their hiding spot and were pleased to discover they had managed to sneak into the Trojan's village! The Greek ships were only hiding around the corner, so they returned and their friends opened the gates to let them invade Troy. The Trojans thought the Greeks had left and were not prepared to defend themselves. The Greeks took over that night and set fire to the city, thus winning the war.

The process of HIV infection is similar to the Greeks using a Trojan Horse to gain access to the city of Troy.

The HIV virus tricks the immune cells (that normally protect us by fighting off infections and viruses) into letting it enter their cell bodies, then quickly takes over the cell for its own purposes. The HIV virus fits into the receptors on these immune cells, like a key fitting into a lock, and the cell gets tricked into "unlocking" and allowing the virus to enter its protective walls. This stage takes up to 6 months, which is why HIV cannot be assessed for a period of time. The virus is now said to have "hijacked" the cell, and begins reproducing itself rapidly. It starts killing white blood cells, which are what protect our body against germs and diseases, and slowly weakens the immune system. When not enough white blood cells remain in the blood stream, the body is unable to fight off infection. HIV is a type of virus called *retrovirus*. Many people with HIV use medicine called *antiretrovirals* to block the virus's ability to replicate within the body and thus delay the onset of AIDS. The term *Anti-retroviral* means a substance that stops or suppresses the activity of a retrovirus like HIV.



How do I talk to my “Little” about HIV/AIDS?

- ◆ You might not feel comfortable bringing the subject of HIV/AIDS up to a child, but many elementary school aged kids have heard of the disease. What they are learning is often inaccurate and frightening so they might look to you to dispel myths. When you and your Little come across an AIDS poster or commercial, ask if he or she has ever heard of it, to find out how much they know.
- ◆ If you do not know the answer to your Little’s questions, ask his or her permission to look into it and discuss it further at your next meeting. Present honest, age-appropriate facts. You might tell an 8-year-old that AIDS is a disease that makes people very sick, while you might explore the topics of safer sex and drug use with a pre-teen. Reassure that while AIDS is a serious disease it is preventable.
- ◆ If you really do not feel comfortable discussing the issue, you could tell your Little that you do not feel knowledgeable enough, or you don’t want to influence him or her with your perspective. Encourage them to speak with their parent or Doctor.
- ◆ Set them straight and clear up misconceptions. If your Little has an inaccurate perception about HIV/AIDS and who is affected by it, explain that the disease does not discriminate and we are all at risk.
- ◆ Foster self-esteem in your Little to empower him to avoid peer pressure and make his own decisions when it comes to sex and drug use.

What is HPV?

Since they sound so similar, some people confuse HPV with HIV. HPV stands for **Human Papilloma Virus**. It is estimated to be one of the most common sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in Canada and around the world. Many strains of HPV have been identified, some of which can lead to cancer and others to genital warts. It is estimated that as many as 75% of sexually active men and women will have at least one HPV infection in their lifetime. There is no known cure for HPV infections, but many people who have healthy immune systems will eventually clear the infection from their bodies. Although a high percentage of sexually active people will be infected with HPV, only a small proportion of these will develop cancer.

Girls and women have the option of receiving the **HPV vaccine**, which helps protect against diseases caused by HPV, like cervical cancer and genital warts. Youth should talk to their doctor if they are interested in receiving the vaccine at a young age as a preventative measure before they become sexually active. Refer to www.healthlinkbc.ca for more information as the vaccine is now part of the BC Health Program and has recently been made available through schools in BC.

Resources

Available from the Fraser Valley Regional Library

For LITTLES (6-12)

- *The Gathering Tree*. Larry Loyie & Constance Brissenden. BC: Theytus Books, 2005.
- *Too Far Away to Touch*. Leslea Newman. New York: Clarion Books, 1995.
- *Tiger Flowers*. Patricia Quinlan. Toronto: Lester Pub, 1994.

For TEENS (13-17)

- *Safe Sex 101: An Overview for Teens*. Margaret O. Hyde and Elizabeth H. Forsyth. Minneapolis: MN: Twenty-First Century Books, 2006.

For BIG BROTHERS/BIG SISTERS & PARENTS

- *HIV Infection: The Facts You Need to Know*. Kenneth L. Packer. New York: F. Watts, 1998.
- *How to Talk with Teens about Really Important Things*. Charles E. Schaefer. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999.
- *Voices that Care: Stories and Encouragements for People with AIDS/HIV and Those Who Love Them*. Neal Hitchens. LA: Lowell House, 1992.



Thank you to the following members of our Panel for

Reviewing this Article:

Dr. Lionel Traverse, MD
Youthco AIDS Society
Dean Spyropoulos
Gerwyn Mills, RN, MA