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1987

# What You Should Know About AIDS

Facts about the disease  
How to protect yourself and your family  
What to tell others



AMERICA  
RESPONDS  
TO AIDS



An Important Message from the U.S. Public Health Service  
Centers for Disease Control



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# An Important Message For All Americans

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**N**o doubt you have read or heard much recently about AIDS. You may believe AIDS doesn't affect you personally, but it does. AIDS affects us all, directly or indirectly – male or female, married or single, young or old, rich or poor.

All of us need to know the facts about AIDS, and we need to join with our fellow Americans in making a commitment to do all we can to protect ourselves, protect those we love, and stop the spread of the disease.

For some, this means influencing family members or friends to eliminate behavior that puts them at a high risk for getting the disease. For others, it means spending time to explain the disease. For all of us, it means not having unnecessary fears about AIDS.

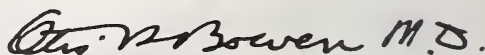
Families, especially, have an important role to play. The family setting is the best place for our young people to learn about AIDS and how to avoid it.

I strongly agree with President Reagan who has stated: "We mustn't allow those with the AIDS virus to suffer discrimination....We must firmly oppose discrimination against those who have AIDS. We must prevent the persecution, through ignorance or malice, of our fellow citizens."

Today, with the leadership of the U.S. Public Health Service under Assistant Secretary Robert E. Windom, M.D., Americans from all walks of life – professionals and volunteers alike – have dedicated themselves to stopping the spread of AIDS and finding a cure.

I urge you to study this leaflet, follow its advice, and share this information with others. It could save your life or the life of someone you love. You may also want to read the report on AIDS by Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, M.D., available free from P.O. Box 23961, Washington, D.C. 20026-3961.

The American response to AIDS has been inspiring. Together, we must continue to do all we can to protect ourselves and those we love.



Otis R. Bowen, M.D.  
Secretary, U.S. Department of  
Health and Human Services

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# What Is AIDS?

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**A**IDS stands for *acquired immunodeficiency syndrome*. Very simply, it is a disease caused by a virus that can damage the brain and destroy the body's ability to fight off illness. AIDS by itself doesn't kill. But it allows other infections (such as pneumonia, cancer and other illnesses) to 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.

Fortunately, the AIDS virus is hard to catch and can be prevented. AIDS is a very serious disease, but you should know these facts:

1

AIDS is not spread by casual contact in schools, at parties, in swimming pools, stores or the workplace

2

You can't catch AIDS by hugging, shaking hands or simply being near a person who is infected with the virus. No person has ever been infected by an insect bite

3

You can't catch AIDS from a toilet seat

*"People are afraid of AIDS, but they don't have to be. We must tell people about the risk of AIDS. We must stop the spread of the disease. The best weapon in the world is information. That's why every American should read this booklet."*

— Jamie Henderson  
AIDS Volunteer  
Los Angeles, CA







## How Do People Get AIDS?

Not everyone is at risk for AIDS. And people who are at risk can protect themselves if they take reasonable precautions. Being safe from AIDS is up to you. It's your responsibility to protect yourself—and those you love. It starts with knowing how people get AIDS.

### Three main ways the AIDS virus is spread:

Having sex with an infected person

Sharing drug needles and syringes with users of heroin, cocaine and other illegal drugs

Babies can be born with the virus if the mother has been infected

### What about blood transfusions?

It is true that some people got AIDS from infected blood transfusions. But that's extremely rare. Today, all donated blood is tested for the AIDS virus.

### What about giving blood?

There is no risk from donating blood. New equipment is used for each donor, each time blood is given.



*"One sexual encounter with an infected person can be all it takes to spread the AIDS virus from one person to another. We must know how to protect ourselves and our families."*

— Jolene Connor  
Nurse Counselor  
Harlem, NY

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## How Can You Tell If You Have The AIDS Virus?

The only way to tell if you have the AIDS virus is by having a blood test. The test looks for changes in your blood caused by the presence of the virus. If you test positive, it means that you have been infected.

You can have the virus without having the disease itself, or without even appearing or feeling ill. And you can transmit the virus to others.

Once infected, you will remain infected for life. It could take ten years or longer for the actual disease to develop, or it may never develop.

If you are worried that you may have been infected, find out about the test. Often it is available free or at a low cost.

## Can You Touch Someone Who Has AIDS?

Yes, you can touch someone who has AIDS. There is no evidence that the virus is spread through casual contact (including shaking hands, social kissing, coughing, sneezing, sharing swimming pools, bed linen, eating utensils, cups, office equipment, chairs). There is no reason to avoid an infected person in ordinary social contact.

### What about doctors, nurses, dentists and other health care workers?

Routine safety measures, such as wearing gloves, protect both patients and health care professionals. Special precautions are taken when handling blood from infected patients, or when giving injections.

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*"One of the misconceptions about AIDS is that it only affects gay men. That's not true. AIDS affects everyone—men, women and children."*

— Suki Ports  
Minority AIDS Project  
New York, NY



*"Each of us must realize that we have the responsibility for keeping AIDS out of our lives. We must learn about AIDS. We must share what we know with our families."*

— Eric Engstrom  
AIDS Project Director  
Minneapolis, MN



*"My son died of AIDS. He was 21 years old. We must be totally open, honest and sincere in discussing AIDS with our children. It could save their lives."*

— Elena Tretot  
Atlanta, GA

## Will You Get AIDS From Kissing?

Kissing a person on the cheek doesn't put you at risk. No cases have been reported where the virus was transmitted by kissing on the mouth. However, small amounts of the virus are sometimes found in saliva. To be safe, experts advise against deep, prolonged "French" kissing with someone who may be infected with the AIDS virus.

## Teenagers Should Avoid Drugs And Sex

Teenagers should be encouraged to say "no" to sex and illegal drugs. Avoiding both drugs and sex is the best, safest way to eliminate risk. Make it a family priority to know about AIDS and share the information in this leaflet with family members and friends.

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## How To Protect Yourself And Your Family

The safest way to avoid being infected by the AIDS virus is to avoid promiscuous sex and illegal drugs. Couples who are not infected, do not use drugs, and have mutually faithful, single-partner sexual relationships are protected from AIDS.

You can get AIDS from one sexual experience. And your risk of becoming infected increases dramatically if you have more than one sexual partner. If you or your partner have more than one sexual partner, you should reduce your risk by using condoms.



*"AIDS is a fatal disease, but everyone needs to understand that it can be prevented. If we know how to protect ourselves and our children, we can stop this disease in its tracks."*

— Dr. Samuel Perry  
A researcher working on  
identifying the symptoms  
of AIDS

## Can You Tell If People Have AIDS?

Most people who are infected look and feel fine. They don't suspect they are carrying the virus. They don't realize they are spreading it to others. You can be infected by having sex with anyone who has the virus, even though they don't show the symptoms of the disease.

If you and your sexual partner are concerned, you should use a condom and talk to your doctor about the AIDS antibody test.

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# 1. Know the facts about AIDS

## 2. Know how to protect yourself and your family

### 3. Tell others

**If you are a parent:**

Learn the facts about AIDS. Talk to your children. Encourage them to share your family's moral and religious values. Make certain they know how to avoid AIDS. Protect yourself and your partner by maintaining a mutually faithful, single-partner relationship.

**If you are a grandparent:**

Learn the facts about AIDS. Talk openly to your children and grandchildren about your concern for their safety and well-being. Tell them how to avoid getting infected with the AIDS virus.

**If you are a young person:**

Discuss and understand and live by your family's values. Say "no" to drugs. And say "no" to sex until you are ready to enter into a mutually faithful, single-partner relationship with an uninfected person.

**If you are sexually active:**

Enter into a mutually faithful, single-partner relationship with an uninfected person, or at least be sure to reduce your risk by using condoms.

**If you think you may be infected with the AIDS virus:**

Talk to your doctor or local health clinic about having the AIDS antibody test. Don't put other people at risk by having sex with them or by sharing drug needles or syringes.

**For more information, call the AIDS Information line,  
24 hours a day, 7 days a week: 1-800-342-AIDS**