

August 3, 2006

# Health@Heart

Philip S. Chua, M.D.

## AIDS: A Death Sentence

### What is AIDS and what is HIV?

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome and HIV means Human Immunodeficiency Virus, the agent responsible for the disease.

### How does the virus cause the disease?

HIV attacks the immune system of the infected person and destroys the CD4 cells (the “generals” in our immune system army), rendering the body’s “security force” without its “commanders,” weak and defenseless to fight off infections. When the immune system breaks down, opportunistic infections set in and the person develops serious and deadly infections and cancers. It is not correct to say that someone “died of AIDS,” since it is really the infections that cause death.

### Can one get AIDS from “contaminated” toilet seats?

No. HIV is a fragile virus that cannot survive outside of the body.

### How is AIDS transmitted?

The virus can be transmitted through the following body fluids: blood, pre-ejaculate fluid, semen, vaginal secretions and breast milk. There is no evidence that HIV is transmitted through sweat, tears, urine or saliva, since the concentration in these body fluids is so small. However, if, say the saliva is contaminated with blood from bleeding gums or a cut in the mouth of an AIDS patient, that saliva can transmit HIV. Kissing, in this situation, is risky.

### Can HIV enter the skin,

No, the virus cannot penetrate the skin, unless the skin is cut or broken, in which case transmission becomes possible. Shaking hands with an infected person is

safe. The virus cannot be transmitted through the air by sneezing or coughing either.

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These are the reasons why casual contact with people with HIV infection is absolutely not dangerous. The widespread misinformation and ignorance have led to unnecessary fear in people's mind and the added emotional suffering on the part of victims of AIDS.

### **How does HIV enter the body?**

The virus enters the bloodstream through mucous membranes, like the lining of the rectum, the walls of the vagina, the urethra (passage channel of the penis), nose, mouth and throat, or by intravenous transfusion of any infected fluid, like blood, plasma, etc., or use of a contaminated needle. The virus must get into the blood stream to cause AIDS.

### **Can one get HIV through oral sex?**

Most definitely, especially the person giving the oral sex, since she/he is exposed to pre-ejaculate fluid, semen, or vaginal secretions and menstrual blood. If there is dental carries, open sores, cut or abrasions in the mouth or gums, the virus can enter the blood stream even faster. While the risk in vaginal or anal sex and in giving oral sex is higher than that of receiving oral sex, the latter form of contact is likewise risky and could be as deadly.

### **Could "finger-sex" cause AIDS?**

Just as we have stated above, the HIV cannot penetrate the skin, unless there is a cut or an abrasion. While medical statistics show that this is true, it is obviously prudent, as dictated by common sense alone, that this practice too should be discouraged when dealing with an HIV carrier or a partner with AIDS.

### **Can a woman transmit HIV to the baby in her womb?**

Yes, maternal to fetal transmission is obviously the rule since their individual blood circulation is "connected" with each other.

### **Does bleach kill the HIV?**

Yes, Chlorox (bleach), with high concentration of Chlorine, kills HIV. This is what “smart” or experienced drug addicts use to “sterilize” their needles and other paraphernalia used in “pushing” narcotics and other illegal drugs. However, there

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is no guarantee that this practice is effective, since the sterilization technique could be flawed.

### **What are the diagnostic criteria for AIDS?**

First, the person must be diagnosed to have HIV-1 or HIV-2. Second, the person must have one of the following: A CD4 cell count less than 200 and less than 14%, and he person tmust have an opportunistic disease. The normal CD4 count is between 800-1200, or greater than 29%. A CD4 count less than 200 indicates a severely damaged immune system.

### **Are condoms effective?**

The use of latex condoms has been proven to be effective in the prevention of HIV infection. However, condoms are known to develop holes or tears during rough handling or during the actual sex act, which will then allow HIV transmission. The best practise is not to have sex with someone who could be exposed to HIV or other (STD) sexually-transmitted diseases. Those with multiple partners have been shown to be at a greater risk, compared to partners who are both monogamous

### **How soon does HIV infection lead to AIDS?**

A blood test that is negative for HIV does not guarantee the person exposed to HIV that he/she will not develop AIDS. As a rule, it can take five to seven years or longer (after exposure ) before people infected with HIV develop AIDS. This is the reason why everyone must be extra-cautious, because AIDS is indeed a death sentence, one that is preceded by a horrible stage of existence, humiliation, pain and suffering.

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