

GLBT TASK FORCE FACT SHEET

HIV INFO FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

Reproduced with thanks from the Washington D.C. Gay and Lesbian Liaison Unit

Q: What is HIV? What is AIDS?

A: HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. This is the virus that causes AIDS, the disease. On the other hand AIDS stands for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome. AIDS is the medical condition caused by HIV. It is a condition that involves a severely weakened immune system – a system that can no longer fight infections. Note that “A” stands for acquired; people become infected only in several specific circumstances.

HIV is a virus. AIDS is a health condition. Remember this when you talk or write about them. You cannot “get” or “give” someone AIDS. You can however, “contract” HIV. HIV may lead to AIDS without proper medical care over time. Your ability as a law enforcement officer to use these two terms properly will reflect well on you.

Q: How is HIV transmitted?

A: HIV is transmitted in very specific ways but you cannot become infected through the air, toilet seats, sharing a beverage, or door knobs. There are two conditions which must be present for HIV transmission to take place. First, you must have contact with a bodily fluid that contains HIV. Second, the virus in the fluid must find a way to enter your blood stream.

Q: What body fluids transmit HIV?

A: There are FIVE body fluids that transmit HIV: Blood, semen, pre-cum, vaginal secretions and breast milk.

“Pre-cum” is a small amount of semen and natural lubricant that appears on the head of the penis when a man is aroused – whether or not he ejaculates. A male does not have to ejaculate to expose you to HIV. Pre-cum also contains HIV. Other bodily fluids such as sweat, saliva, tears, urine and feces are not on this list and mere contact with these fluids cannot infect you, unless they contain blood.

Q: How does HIV enter the bloodstream?

A: If someone has had contact with an HIV+ person’s bodily fluid, then how does the virus get into the bloodstream? Open cuts, sores, lacerations, open abrasions, inflamed urethra (interior of the penis), open blisters using syringes.

Q: As a public safety worker, how can I protect myself from HIV and other life-threatening diseases?

A: Every agency has its own policies and procedures regarding “Universal Precautions”. You should consult your agency’s policies and procedures. or contact your Health and Safety Representative. In general, street-level public safety workers must depend on basic protection that can be carried on their person. Latex or other kind of impermeable gloves, breathing masks and alcohol/bleach wipes are most common types of protection carried by street-level public safety workers. These items are readily available.....

Q: What else should I know?

A: “HIV antibody tests” are used to determine if you have been exposed to HIV. After a person is infected with HIV, it takes time for the person’s body to react and produce antibodies. This period between exposure/infection and the actual production of HIV antibodies by your body is called the “window period”. It is very important that you understand this concept so you know when to take an HIV test. The earliest you should be tested after presumed exposure is 21 days. Taking the HIV antibody test the day after you think you’ve been exposed is a waste of time. This may produce a “false negative result.” You may have HIV, but the virus has yet to reproduce enough to be detected in your body. You must wait 21 days at a minimum to get tested for the results to be accurate.

Three months after exposure, 90-95% of people who have been infected will produce enough HIV antibodies to provide an accurate HIV antibody test. After six months, 99% of infected people will have a reliable test result.

Ontario has the highest number of positive HIV test reports in Canada with a total of 23,863 (1985 to June 2003).

In 2002, there were 1,143 positive HIV tests reported in Ontario (this does NOT include those tested anonymously by clinics offering such services) an increase of 911 cases reported in 2001.

(Statistics courtesy of AIDS Committee of Toronto)