

## For further information

Gay Scotland, tel: 031-557 2625 (24 hour answering service) can answer general queries about AIDS. They can also give you details of your local clinics and can put you in touch with local gay support groups.

Terrence Higgins Trust (BM/AIDS, London WC1N 3XX) runs an AIDS Information Line (01) 278 8745 from 8 p.m. - 10 p.m. Mondays to Fridays and runs a support group for people with AIDS, and their friends and families.

The Scottish Health Education Group  
Health Education Centre  
Woodburn House, Canaan Lane,  
Edinburgh EH10 4SG

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## Books

*AIDS - Your questions answered*, Richard B. Fisher, Gay Men's Press.

*The AIDS handbook*, Kenneth H Mayer MD and H F Pizer, Bantam Books (Toronto, New York, London and Sydney).

Some facts about

# AIDS.

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome



THE SCOTTISH HEALTH EDUCATION GROUP

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## What is AIDS?

AIDS is a very rare condition which prevents the body's defences from working properly. As a result, people may get illnesses which the body would normally be able to fight off quite easily. Some of these illnesses can become serious or fatal.

Many AIDS patients have one or both of two rare diseases:

**Kaposi's sarcoma** - a type of cancer mainly of the skin, but also affecting other organs.

**Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia** - a serious infection of the lungs.

## Why is it called AIDS?

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

**Acquired** - means that it's caught from someone or something as opposed to inherited.

**Immune Deficiency** - you've got an immune deficiency when your body can't defend itself against certain illnesses.

**Syndrome** - the illnesses you can get as a result.

## Who gets AIDS?

By October 1984 there had been about 7000 cases of AIDS reported worldwide. The USA was the country most affected: 6250 of the cases were reported there.

Nearly three quarters of all AIDS patients are gay men.

you can that your partners are restricting the number of partners that they have, too. It's not yet known

whether the way you have sex affects your risk of getting AIDS. Until more is known, the only completely safe type of sex is masturbation.

Using a condom *may* help to reduce your risk of getting AIDS, and in any case it can protect you against other sexually transmitted diseases.

## Should you give blood?

Some gay men have the AIDS virus in their body, but do not know that they've got it. So to avoid the risk of spreading the virus, gay men are asked not to give blood.

For further information, see

"Important message to Blood Donors" a leaflet available from the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service.

## What is being done

Research is being done in the USA and other countries and there have been major developments in finding the cause of AIDS, and in recognising the early signs of the disease. There has also been some progress in methods of treating the resulting illnesses.

## Is there a test for AIDS?

There's no quick and easy test which will tell you yes or no. AIDS can only be diagnosed by medical examination and repeated laboratory tests. If you go to see a doctor, he or she will

- take details of any past illnesses
- give you a complete medical examination
- take a small sample of your blood and test it to see if there are any signs of lowered resistance. Even if there are, this doesn't necessarily mean that you've got AIDS. There are lots of other reasons for lower resistance.

If you are at all concerned, the best thing you can do is to see your doctor or go to your clinic.

## What happens if it is suspected that you have AIDS?

You will probably be admitted to hospital for a full check-up and for treatment of any serious infections.

You may then be able to go home but will need to be carefully checked and will probably need further treatment for other infections.

There is, *as yet*, no treatment for the basic disease.

## Reducing the risks for gay men

The best advice for gay men is to keep down the number of different sexual partners you have and to be as sure as

About a fifth are drug addicts, both men and women, who shared needles.

The others include: people from Haiti Africans from Central Africa patients who had received blood transfusions from infected donors women who had bisexual partners or partners who were intravenous drug users the newborn babies of mothers who had AIDS haemophiliacs (people who need to be treated with blood products from donated blood, to make the blood clot normally).

In the UK, 88 cases of AIDS had been reported by October 1984 - more than three quarters of them gay men.

It is *extremely* rare to find a case of AIDS in people who do not belong to any of the "high risk" groups listed.

## Is AIDS catching?

Recent evidence suggests that AIDS is caused by a virus that can be passed on in two ways:

- 1 during sex (in much the same way as hepatitis B is passed on), or
- 2 if a person comes into contact with blood that is already infected. Some intravenous drug users who use other people's needles may have got AIDS in this way, as the used needles would have been in contact with someone else's blood.

There is absolutely no reason to think that AIDS can be spread through the air, or by touch.

# What are the symptoms?

Now hang on ... as you begin to read this list of symptoms, you might start thinking "Yes, I've got that ... and that ... and that ... Oh no, I've got it." Well, perhaps, but most probably not. Remember:

- AIDS is extremely rare even among people in the "high risk" groups
- it's only if you have many of these symptoms together and if they last for a long time that AIDS might possibly be the cause
- there can be lots of other reasons for nearly all these symptoms. For example, swollen glands can be a sign of glandular fever, and tiredness, fever and weight loss are much more likely to be signs of worry or going without sleep, or a sign of a cold coming on.

The symptoms which may suggest AIDS are:

**Swollen glands**, especially in the neck and armpits.

**Profound fatigue**, which lasts for several weeks, with no obvious cause.

**Unexpected weight loss** - more than 10 pounds (4.5 kg) in two months.

**Fever and night sweats**, lasting for several weeks.

**Diarrhoea** which lasts for more than a week, with no obvious cause.

**Shortness of breath and a dry cough** lasting longer than it would if it were just from a bad cold.

**Skin disease** - new painless, flat or raised, pink to purple blotches, hard in texture, getting bigger, like a bruise or a blood blister. These may appear anywhere on the skin, including the mouth or eyelids.

**Thrush** - a thick whitish coating in the mouth or throat. In men, thrush may also appear as irritating little white spots on the end of the penis; or as a white discharge from the rectum. In women, thrush is a very common infection which causes an irritating white discharge from the vagina.

# If you're worried

Go to your GP or to a clinic which specialises in genito-urinary infections.

Depending on where you live, these clinics may be called a sexually transmitted disease (STD) clinic, a Special Clinic or a GU (genito-urinary) clinic. You don't need to take a letter from your GP and you don't usually need to make an appointment for a visit, but check with the clinic first.

To find your nearest clinic, look in the phone book under VD (Venereal Disease). If you have any trouble finding it, Gay Scotland (tel: 031-557 2625) can tell you where your nearest clinic is.

For further information about AIDS, you can contact the Terrence Higgins Trust AIDS Information Line on (01) 278 8745 from 8 p.m. - 10 p.m., Mondays to Fridays or you can write to Terrence Higgins Trust, BM/AIDS, London WC1 3XX.