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enquire about **AIDS**



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INDIAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION

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What is AIDS?

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, a condition where the body's immune system has been virtually destroyed leaving it vulnerable to infections and cancers.

AIDS is caused by a group of viruses called HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus). HIV attacks and destroys white blood cells which are key defenders in the body's immune system. As a defence mechanism, the immune system produces antibodies to attack the HIV intruder. However, unlike other diseases, the antibodies are ineffective against the AIDS virus. As the white cells die, the body naturally tries to replace them and finally becomes exhausted. That is the point when the immune system breaks down. That is the stage of AIDS.

How do people get AIDS?

AIDS is spread through sexual contact, through contact with infected blood, from mother to infant.

Sexual contact has been identified as a factor in about 75% of all AIDS cases. The AIDS virus is found in blood, semen and vaginal secretions. When these fluids are exchanged during sexual activity, the virus can pass from one person to another. The risk is especially high with blood and semen.

The second most common way that AIDS is spread is blood-to-blood transmission.

AIDS can also be transmitted if a woman has the virus when she is pregnant.

What are the symptoms of AIDS?

The symptoms of AIDS are common to many other illnesses such as colds, tuberculosis and bronchitis. With AIDS however, these symptoms are often long-lasting and may include:

- persistent, unexplained fatigue or weight loss of more than 10 lbs.
- unexplained fever, shaking chills or night sweats lasting longer than several weeks.
- persistent white or purple blotches in the mouth or tongue.
- persistent cough and shortness of breath unrelated to smoking.
- pink or purple blotches or bumps in the skin or mouth initially resembling bruises but not disappearing.

What kind of tests are available?

In order to detect the AIDS (HIV antibodies) there are different tests available. One is called the Screening Test (ELISA HIV antibody test) which is used to show that someone is not infected (NEGATIVE). Other more specific tests (CONFIRMATORY TESTS), are used to confirm the presence of HIV infection (POSITIVE).

Are the tests really accurate?

The screening ELISA test is highly accurate (99.9%) when showing NEGATIVE but unreliable when showing non-negative results. The possibilities or error includes:

- a test result which may indicate that a person has antibodies to the AIDS virus when none actually exist; this is referred to as "false reactive". A more specific CONFIRMATORY test is necessary to arrive at a "true" test result.

Is there a cure or vaccine?

At present, there is no cure, and no vaccine is likely in the next five years. However, recent drugs, like AZT, DDS, CDO slow down the virus and offer hope for those infected.

HIGH RISK GROUPS IN INDIA

Prostitutes:- Nearly 35 per cent of all HIV positive persons are prostitutes. Despite this, they entertain 4 to 5 client each, everyday.

They are ignorant about AIDS and do not take any preventive measures like using condoms. Bombay has an estimated 1,00,000 prostitutes; 15 to 20 per cent of them are children (below 18 years).

Hijras :- Most Hijras practice homosexual prostitution. In Bombay alone there are 2000 of them.

PROFESSIONAL BLOOD DONORS:-

Nearly 10% of them are infected with HIV. Among plasmapheresis donors, 90% of them are HIV infected.

How safe are condoms?

Condoms have been shown to block the virus completely in the laboratory, but in practice, there is a 10% contraceptive failure rate in the general population. The way condoms fail in preventing pregnancy in the same way they fail in AIDS prevention.

**AIDS
PREVENTION IS THE GOAL
EDUCATION IS THE KEY!**