

AIDS - LET'S TALK

Everyone has heard something about AIDS. Some mine bosses have tested workers on the mines for the AIDS germ. And these bosses sent workers who were found to be carrying the AIDS germ back to the countries they came from. These bosses talk of AIDS coming from Africa. Others say AIDS is only spread by men who sleep with other men. Some black people say that it is only white people who get AIDS. And some white people believe that only black people get AIDS. What is the truth about AIDS?

AIDS is a disease that anyone can get. Black people can get AIDS. White people can get AIDS. Men who have sex with men can get AIDS. Women who have sex with women can get AIDS. Men who have sex with women and women who have sex with men can get AIDS. Unborn babies can get AIDS if their mothers are carrying the AIDS germ.

There is no cure for AIDS. But we can prevent the spread of AIDS if we know more about the AIDS germ and how it is spread.

What is AIDS?

AIDS is a sickness caused by the AIDS germ. This germ is very small. If it gets into our bodies it can live there for many years without us knowing about it. We will not feel sick and we will not know we are carrying the germ. This is because it takes many years for the AIDS germ to weaken your body. A person can carry the AIDS germ for up to 14 years before getting sick. Once you get sick with AIDS your body can no longer fight off sickness like before. You feel weak. And you lose weight. Later you may get serious chest infections, skin rashes and a running stomach.

A person who has the AIDS germ but has not yet got sick is called an AIDS carrier. They can pass on the AIDS germ to other people even when they are still healthy. They will not know they have the AIDS germ and they will not know that they have passed it on to other people. Most people who pick up the AIDS germ will die from the AIDS sickness. They will

die because their body is not able to fight any illnesses. There is no treatment for the AIDS sickness. This is why people are so afraid of the sickness.

How Do You Get AIDS?

The AIDS germ has to come out of one person's body and get into the next person's body. It comes out in the man's sperm, from the discharge from the opening to the woman's womb (cervix), and from blood. It only gets into another person's body through a cut, or a sore or a needle prick. It cannot get through healthy skin.

* You can get AIDS from having sex with someone who already has the AIDS germ in their body. This can happen with sex between men and women. And it can happen with sex between men and men. The germ travels in the man's sperm, and it travels in the discharge from a woman's cervix. The more people you have sex with, the bigger your chance is of getting AIDS.

* Babies can get the AIDS germ. Mothers who have the AIDS germ can give it to their babies before they are born. The child is born healthy but becomes sick before its first birthday. The child usually dies before it reaches two years.

* You can pick up the AIDS germ from blood that has the AIDS germ in it. This blood has to get inside your body through a cut or a sore or a needle prick. This can happen when you get a blood transfusion that has not been checked for the AIDS germ. Or it can happen if you are pricked by a dirty needle that has the AIDS germ on it. This may be a danger for health workers.

So the AIDS germ does not pass through the air. There is, therefore, no need to run away from a person who has the AIDS germ.

How Do We Prevent AIDS?

Condoms prevent the AIDS germ from passing from one person's body to the other person's body during sex. In other words, condoms

ABOUT IT

prevent the AIDS germ in the sperm of the man, or in the discharge from the cervix of the woman, going into the other person's body during sex. Everyone should use a condom when having sex with someone you don't know very well, with someone who has many partners and with a prostitute.

The more people you have sex with, or the more people your partner has sex with, the bigger chance you have of picking up or spreading the AIDS germ.

Education About Aids Is Important.

We need to know how the AIDS germ is spread. And how it is not spread. If we know these things we can help prevent the AIDS germ from spreading. If a person is very worried that they may have the AIDS germ, then they can get a blood test done at a clinic. The blood test can tell if the AIDS germ is in the blood.

There is no cure for AIDS but we can discuss ways of preventing AIDS. The government is not providing us with the information we need to help us. We have to take this on as our responsibility to protect ourselves and others. We need to discuss AIDS in our unions and community organisations. We need to speak to our children about AIDS. We need to practise safe sex with condoms. If you are sexually active, don't take a chance. Keep condoms next to your bed, in your bag, and in your pockets. Then they are there with you when you need them.

If you want more information on AIDS you can get the CRITICAL HEALTH booklet on AIDS. Write to CRITICAL HEALTH, P.O. Box 16250, Doornfontein, 2028. The Workplace Information Group (WIG) has a pamphlet that you can get from them. Write to WIG, P.O. Box 5244, Johannesburg 2000. The Industrial Health Research group in Cape Town is writing a booklet for union educators. This booklet has information on AIDS for workers and unions. You can get this from Industrial Health Research Group, Department of Sociology, University of Cape Town, Private Bag, Rondebosch, 7700. All of these groups will be happy to help you. You can also write to SPEAK with any questions about AIDS. You don't have to give your name if you don't want to. We will answer all letters that we get.

AIDS IS A KILLER...

but we can try to stop it spreading...

by thinking about it seriously

you may have only one sexual partner. But if your partner is having sex with other people the risk of getting AIDS gets bigger. Because those people probably have other sexual partners. And those others have others. And so on. In the end you may be linked up with people all over.

by understanding that condoms are clever



they prevent the mixing of sexual fluid between partners. They stop the AIDS germ from being passed on. There are also other good things about condoms. They also help to stop other sex diseases, like VD from being passed on. And of course they also stop you from getting pregnant. Condoms are a very healthy way to have sex! Women and men can buy them at a chemist, or get them from family planning.

by being caring and responsible about those people we have sex with.