

MEDICAL INFORMATION ABOUT AIDS

The Disease and the Risks

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is an infectious disease which affects the body's immune system. AIDS is a blood-borne, sexually transmitted disease that is not spread by casual contact. However, students may run the risk of exposure to patients or to the blood and body fluids of patients affected with this disease. AIDS is caused by a virus called Human T-Lymphotropic Virus Type III or Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) carried in the blood and body secretions of infected persons.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have received several reports of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection in health care workers. The occupational risk of acquiring HIV for health care workers is very low and is estimated to be less than 1% in those who have parenteral contact via needle stick with blood of infected patients.

Risk of Exposure

Since medical history, physical examination and laboratory testing cannot always reliably identify all patients infected with HIV, blood and body fluid precautions should be consistently used for all patients. This approach of "universal blood and body-fluid precautions 'or' standard precautions" should be used in the care of all patients, especially including those in emergency-care settings in which the risk of blood exposure is increased and the infection status of the patient is usually unknown.

Standard precautions are intended to minimize health care workers' risk of exposure to blood-borne pathogens by preventing parenteral (needle stick), mucous membrane, and nonintact skin contact with blood and other body fluids. Blood is the single most important source of HIV, HBV, and other blood-borne pathogens in the occupational setting. There are no vaccines for AIDS protection.

Standard precautions also apply to semen and vaginal secretions. Although both of these fluids have been implicated in the sexual transmission of HIV and HBV, they have not been implicated in occupational transmission from patient to health care worker.

Outside the human body, HIV is a fragile virus that is easy to destroy with common disinfectant. Environmental contamination of surfaces or equipment by blood and body secretions has not been a means of transmitting HIV to health care workers.

References

To read or receive a copy of more detailed Hepatitis B information, please view the following website for the Centers of Disease Control in Atlanta:

<https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hbv/>