

Do you know your HIV/AIDS status?

HIV/AIDS disease was first recognized in 1981 when unusual numbers of people with rare diseases surfaced: **Kaposi's Sarcoma**, a form of skin cancer, and **Pneumocystis Carinii Pneumonia**, a form of pneumonia. In 1984, Dr. Robert Gallo isolated the retrovirus which causes AIDS. In 1986, the AIDS virus received its final name Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).

In 1987, the FDA approved Zidovudine (AZT) as the first antiretroviral drug to be used as a treatment for AIDS. Additional effective drugs became available as of 1989.

By December 1990 over 307,000 AIDS cases had been officially reported to World Health Organization, but the actual number was estimated to be closer to a million.

The red ribbon was launched as an international symbol of AIDS awareness in 1991.

In 1992, the first successful use of combination drug therapy for the treatment of AIDS was approved by the FDA.

By 1994, AIDS had become the leading cause of death amongst Americans between the ages of 25 and 44. 400,000 people in the United States had developed AIDS since 1981, and over 250,000 people had died.

The FDA approved the use of Saquinavir, the first of a new group of Protease Inhibitor antiretroviral drugs, in 1995. In 1996, it was realized that triple combination therapy, that is three drugs taken together was likely to be more effective than dual therapy. Three drugs were more likely to suppress the virus, to prevent it from replicating, and so prevent the development of drug resistance. In 1997, the FDA granted approval for Delavirdine, the first in the latest group of drugs, the non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors. During the year, it became apparent that some of the side effects of the protease inhibitor drugs could be serious.

It was also estimated that 2.3 million people died of AIDS in 1997 - a 50% increase over 1996. In 1999, the first human trial of an AIDS vaccine was started.

The update on world HIV infections, published to coincide with World AIDS Day on Friday 1st December 2000, predicted that 36.1 million people would be living with HIV by the end of 2000, up from 34.3 million a year ago and 50 per cent higher than predictions made in 1991. There will be 5.3 million new infections in 2000, and 21.8 million people have so far died of AIDS.



The Symptoms of the Disease

A few weeks after being infected with the AIDS virus, people may experience flu-like symptoms, such as a fever. They soon feel better, but the virus stays in their body. Eventually, most people infected with HIV get AIDS. They become very sick because the virus has weakened their natural immune system to the point where they can no longer avoid diseases that the immune system would normally combat successfully. People with AIDS are often tired and they lose weight easily. They get pneumonia and tuberculosis, brain infections, cancer, and other illnesses. Many people die a year or two after developing full-blown AIDS.

How HIV/AIDS Infects

AIDS is caused by the human immunodeficiency virus, also known as HIV or AIDS virus. The AIDS virus cannot infect people as easily as many other viruses. It can take up to ten years or more for the AIDS virus to make people sick. In the meantime, people with the virus may look and feel healthy, often for years. People get AIDS typically from one of the following interactions:

- sharing hypodermic needles, such as when injecting illegal drugs
- having sexual contact, such as oral, vaginal, or anal sex
- being born to an HIV-infected mother
- getting HIV-infected blood into an open wound

The HIV virus does not live long outside of the body and is destroyed by simple cleaning methods.

HIV/AIDS Today

As of December 2004, an estimated 415,193 people are reported to be living with AIDS. In all, since the disease was first reported over 20 years ago, an estimated 944,306 people have developed AIDS in the United States. Of those, 529,113 (56%) had died as of December 2004.

Many of those who are infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, are unaware of their HIV status and may unknowingly transmit the virus to others. An estimated 40,000 new HIV infections occur in the United States each year. Of those, approximately 25% of HIV positive people are undiagnosed and unaware of their HIV infection. Between 54 percent and 70 percent of sexual transmissions of HIV are via people unaware of their HIV status. In America, 40 percent of HIV diagnoses are made late, when the patient's disease is already advanced.

Reference

CDC report, "A Glance at the HIV Epidemic" (December 2000).