

AIDS: The Disease Facilitates Getting Other Diseases

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The human body is capable of protecting itself with the help of its immune system against pathogens and organisms that cause infections which threaten our health. However, there is a disease, which has a mission to defuse the effectiveness of the immune system, which spreads by blood and sexual fluids, which is untreatable and which threatens our lives and causes deaths in any age, and that disease is called AIDS. It is important to learn the origin, ways of transmission, symptoms, threats and available treatments in order to understand the seriousness of AIDS.

To understand how serious a disease AIDS is, we should know its origin. AIDS, an acronym for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, is a disease caused by a virus which is called HIV or Human Immunodeficiency Virus. Having the disease AIDS means becoming infected with HIV and when a person is infected with HIV, his body tries to fight that infection by bringing out molecules called antibodies which are special molecules to fight HIV. To understand whether a person has HIV infection, these antibodies are looked for in HIV blood test (What Is Aids, n.d.). Although it is easy to explain and make tests to see whether somebody has it, the situation was much different around 1980, since it was new and unidentified in terms of classical pathology and epidemiology. The first warning of AIDS came from Los Angeles with increasing mononucleosis-like syndrome, hectic fever, weight loss and swollen lymph nodes in patients who were young people, most of whom were homosexual. Physicians from Los Angeles and New York examined their patients with the new virus, collected blood samples and compared results. The disease officially first reported on June 5, 1981, by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the federal epidemiology agency in Atlanta (Grmek, 1990).

According to subsequent researches by the CDC, HIV virus arrived in the US around 1968 and had struck in the late 1970s. Though still a hypothesis, it is thought that the virus passed to humans from African chimpanzees (Pearson, 2003). Whether the hypothesis is true or not, it is certain that HIV is a transmitting virus from one to another. Transmission of the virus can occur by having sex with an infected person, sharing or re-using things like needles, drinking an infected woman's breast milk or being given birth by her, blood transfusion from an infected person and rarely by oral sex or deep kissing (What Is Aids, n.d.). To infect somebody, the virus has to pass the body's defenses such as skin and saliva which protect the body against infections caused by blood or sexual fluids. In contrast to common beliefs, mosquito bites, coughing or sneezing, sharing household items, or swimming in the same pool with a HIV infected person does not cause one to get the virus because only blood or sexual fluids getting inside one's body cause it (Stopping the Spread of HIV, n.d.).

There are several ways that the HIV virus can spread and there are several symptoms of AIDS such as symptoms early after infection (acute HIV), symptoms of the immune system, symptoms of the GI tract, respiratory symptoms, symptoms of the skin and mucous membranes, and neurological – emotional symptoms. Symptoms early after infection, acute HIV, are flu-like symptoms such as fever, headache, muscle and joint pain, sore throat, rash and diarrhea. After entering into the body, HIV attacks the immune system and makes it weaker, so it becomes difficult for the immune system to fight against infections. That situation elicits symptoms of the immune system, such as swollen lymph nodes in the neck, axilla or groin, fever, and night sweats. Symptoms of the GI tract are symptoms ranging from poor appetite to diarrhea. HIV virus also affects the respiratory system. Respiratory symptoms are shortness of breath, dry cough and productive cough. Skin rash, lesions of some colors on the skin, white patches on the tongue, canker sores are symptoms of the skin and mucous membranes. There are also neurological – emotional symptoms such as depression, confusion, weakness, or changes in level of consciousness, numbness, tingling or burning in the feet, hands or face (Cichocki, 2010).

It is important to know the threats of AIDS and the situations it causes so that we can understand that preventing from getting AIDS while you are still healthy is a better choice than searching and waiting for treatments.

According to WHO/UNAIDS data, by 2007 the number of the people with AIDS increased to 33.2 million with more than 95% of those people in developing countries. AIDS was declared “a global emergency” in June 2001 by the United Nations General Assembly. Effort of Member States about HIV prevention and care had positive results like 25% reduction in infection rates among 15-24 years old and 50% reduction in the number of infected infants by 2010 (HIV/AIDS, n.d.). Why are individuals and health organizations so concerned about AIDS? First of all, it is a disease which defuses our immune system. If the immune system is defused, it cannot fight against diseases, even against simple ones. In other words, if you have AIDS, you can die even because of a simple flu. Beside serious health threats, it has a big impact on social life as well. Overreacting is a part of human nature. People know that AIDS is a dangerous disease, but usually they do not have enough knowledge about it. Once they learn that you are infected with HIV, most of them will behave like you are a leper and will avoid socializing with you. Since most people have no idea that they cannot get AIDS by sharing a cup or even a pencil, you feel the heaviness of the label on your forehead. Although the way they behave is not right and is inappropriate, hiding that you have the disease is not ethical and there are some regulations about hiding and making others infected. Another reason for concern about AIDS is it is a lifelong disease that cannot be cured.

Although there is no cure available for AIDS and no way to clear the virus from the body, there are some medications, called Anti-HIV or antiretroviral. The aim of those medications are controlling the reproduction of the virus and slowing or stopping the progression of HIV related disease. Those Anti-HIV medications do not cure AIDS and do not prevent the patient from transmitting HIV to others. The Anti-HIV medications approved by FDA, the US Food and Drug Administration, are Nucleoside Reverse Transcriptase Inhibitors, Nucleoside Reverse Transcriptase Inhibitors, Protease Inhibitors, Fusion Inhibitors (AIDS and HIV Infection, n.d.). To keep not only our health but also social life, we should try to prevent getting infected. AIDS is an untreatable and lifelong disease and this disease threatens a patient’s life by inactivating his/her immune system. The best thing to do about AIDS is preventing the HIV virus, and that kind of prevention is not that hard since it does not spread easily because it is transmitted by blood and sexual fluids. In hospitals, several blood tests are done before performing any blood transfusion and if we are careful enough, if we do not have unprotected sex, do not share personal equipments like needles we can protect ourselves from infected with HIV and having the disease AIDS.

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