



AIDS

**GAY HEALTH ACTION
INFORMATION LEAFLET 1
(REVISED) FEBRUARY 1986**

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- **AIDS** is a serious disease but you can do much to prevent it.
- **AIDS** is not a 'homosexual disease', a 'gay plague', a 'moral problem', or a 'punishment from God'. It is a virus disease somewhat like Hepatitis-B only much more severe. It is not special to gay men. (In France, Belgium, and in several African countries there are more cases among heterosexuals than among gays).
- The virus is difficult to contact: it can only be transmitted by full sexual intercourse, or by contact with infected blood or blood products.
MOST PEOPLE (95%) WITH THE VIRUS DO NOT GET AIDS.

AIDS is much more than a medical problem. It has been used by the press and T.V. to arouse anti-gay prejudices and to attempt to deny our civil liberties. The misinformation carried particularly by the newspapers is not accidental. Although the National Union of Journalists has taken a stand on the proper reporting of AIDS, this has been frequently ignored in cheap anti-gay sensationalism.

Our work in GAY HEALTH ACTION is part of the ongoing fight for lesbian and gay liberation which because of the anti-gay hysteria on AIDS is now more necessary than ever. Attempts may be made to control our lives and such freedoms as we have. A comparison can be made with the way the issue of cervical cancer has been used to limit women's sexual freedom rather than become the focus for full screening and medical services.

This leaflet should also be useful to people in other at-risk groups such as haemophiliacs and I.V. drug users and their partners, with whom we share a common concern to minimise the effects of this disease in Ireland.

ACQUIRED IMMUNE DEFICIENCY SYNDROME (AIDS)

It is generally accepted that the H.T.L.V-3 virus is the cause of AIDS. Syndrome means a group of signs, symptoms, and presenting diseases which must be present, together with a positive result to the H.T.L.V-3 test, before AIDS is diagnosed.

People with AIDS suffer a greatly damaged immune system. This prevents the body fighting off other diseases (pneumonia, certain cancers, etc.) which would normally not affect it. It is these diseases that cause the death of a high proportion of the people who have the FULL AIDS SYNDROME.

We must not overreact, however. AIDS is still relatively rare and if you follow the guidelines in this leaflet the risks will be very low. Remember too that all life involves risks: road accidents; smoking; fats causing heart disease. We can learn to live with the risk of AIDS as well.

AIDS IN IRELAND

So far, there have been very few cases of full AIDS in this country. However the number of people who have got the virus in their blood has risen according to government statistics. The percentages are estimated as follows of the people who have been tested in each of these groups:

HAEMOPHILIACS	34%
I.V. DRUG USERS	33%
GAY MEN	10%

The majority of these will not develop AIDS. The disease can take up to six years to develop, so the future number of cases is uncertain. We recommend that anyone in an at-risk group should follow the safe-sex guidelines. This will reduce your own risk and the risk of the virus spreading in the community.

In this, as in other aspects of life, we all share a responsibility to each other.

HOW DO YOU GET THE AIDS VIRUS

- By some sexual practices.
- By sharing needles.
- Through infected blood products.

You CANNOT get the AIDS virus, by social kissing, by touching, by drinking from another person's glass or by shared bathroom or toilet facilities. You CANNOT get it from a person who has been tested anti-body positive unless either their blood, semen, or vaginal secretions enter your body.

Recent reports have advised against sharing razors or toothbrushes. There is a possible risk if the virus is in one person's blood, then it might be passed to another's blood through razor cuts or mouth cuts.



WHAT IS THE TREATMENT?

THERE IS AS YET NO VACCINE OR MEDICINE WHICH CAN PREVENT SOMEONE FROM DEVELOPING AIDS, OR WHICH WILL CURE IT. Sometimes the secondary diseases (cancers, etc.) can be treated with some success.

IS THERE A TEST FOR AIDS?

No. the HTLV-3 test is a blood test. A sample is examined for evidence of antibodies to the HTLV-3 virus. If antibodies are present, this means that you have at some stage been in contact with the virus. It does NOT mean that you have AIDS or that you will develop AIDS.

People with AIDS become very obviously and seriously ill. If you feel very unwell for several weeks, or if you have a sudden loss of weight (more than ten pounds), you should have a medical check-up. Be satisfied that your chosen doctor is well informed on AIDS.

The implications of taking the HTLV-3 test and of being tested positive are fully discussed in G.H.A. Information Leaflet No.2. "AIDS: THE HTLV-3 TEST", which is essential reading if you are thinking of taking the test.

WHY DO ONLY SOME PEOPLE WITH THE VIRUS GET AIDS?

No one is certain but there are some ideas.

- Repeated exposure to the virus increases the risk.

- Some people's bodies are simply better able to fight infection.
- Other infections (Syphilis, Hepatitis, Glandular Fever, etc.) may make the AIDS virus more active. A regular check at the S.T.D. clinic can help.
- Casual drugs can reduce the body's ability to fight infection. (Even the heavy use of tobacco and alcohol)

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF A PARTNER DEVELOPS AIDS OR IS TESTED POSITIVE?

Don't panic. This does not mean that you will get AIDS or that you have the VIRUS. However, you may be more at risk. It will help to talk to CAIRDE or to your medical advisor.

Since it seems that repeated exposure to the virus increases the risk to health, it would be wise to follow the safe sex guidelines.

The virus can also be passed to an unborn child by either the Father or the Mother, and babies born with the virus have very little resistance to the full disease. People at risk should therefore ensure reliable contraception.

STAY HEALTHY!

Healthy people are less likely to develop AIDS even if they get the virus. Good nutrition, proper sleep, and exercise all help (and help to prevent a great many other diseases as well).

DONATING BLOOD

People in risk groups are asked NOT TO DONATE BLOOD AND NOT TO CARRY AN ORGAN DONOR CARD. This is a simple and necessary precaution because of the possible risks: it does not mean that there is anything necessarily wrong with your blood.

Nobody should donate blood for the purpose of having it tested for virus infection.

LET'S PLAY SAFE!

Protecting yourself from coming into contact with the virus does not mean giving up sex. If you follow the safe sex guideline you do not have to limit your sexual encounters. Its the kind of sex that matters, so let's play safe. Up to now we have been inhibited by traditional attitudes to sex and its many possible pleasures. Its not easy to change but talking to your partner about both the risks and the possibilities will help. Cuddling, Massage, Fantasy, Exploring each others bodies, are just some examples: be creative.

- ▶ A MAN SHOULD NOT COME INSIDE HIS PARTNER'S BODY.
- ▶ IF YOU CHOOSE OTHERWISE, USE A CONDOM AND A WATER-BASED LUBRICANT (e.g. K.Y. Other lubricants can damage the condom)
- ▶ AVOID ACTIVITIES WHICH EXPOSE YOU AND YOUR PARTNER TO EACH OTHER'S BLOOD.

GAY HEALTH ACTION is a group formed with the support of almost all gay groups in Ireland. Our programme is to provide information to our community on all aspects of gay health and to actively campaign for medical services. CAIRDE is a support group for people affected by AIDS i.e. people tested antibody positive, or people with AIDS, their partners, friends, and families.

GAY INFORMATION SERVICES DUBLIN:

T-A-F- 710608 (8.00-10.00 pm Sun-Fri: (Thurs, Lesbian Line): Sat 3.30-6.00 pm)

BELFAST: CARA-FRIEND. 222023 (7.30-10.00 pm, Mon-Wed.)

CORK: GAY INFORMATION CORK. 967026 (7.00-9.00 pm, Wed. only)

DERRY: CARA-FRIEND. 263120 (7.30-10.00 pm, Thurs. only).

S.T.D. (Sexually Transmitted Diseases) CLINICS.

DUBLIN: MATER HOSPITAL — SIR PATRICK DUNS — 766942

BELFAST: ROYAL VICTORIA HOSPITAL — 220159

CORK: VICTORIA HOSPITAL — 966844

GALWAY: V.D. Clinic — 64000

DERRY: ALTNAGELVIN HOSPITAL — 45171

GAY HEALTH ACTION

10 Fownes Street, Dublin 2. Phone: 01-710895, 11 am to 4 pm, Mon-Fri.

GAY HEALTH ACTION

24 Sullivans Quay, Cork. Phone: 021-967660

CAIRDE

c/o 10 Fownes Street, Dublin 2. Phone: 01-710895, 11 am to 4 pm, Mon-Fri.