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GAY HEALTH ACTION

INFORMATION

LEAFLET 1

MAY 1985

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INFORMATION

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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). However gays, at the moment, are at more risk because of the worldwide spread of the virus in the gay community.
- It is relatively easy to catch the virus by full sexual contact but **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 mis-information carried by the newspapers particularly is not accidental. The National Union of Journalists has taken a stand on the proper reporting of AIDS, but this has been almost entirely 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. In the next few months further 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 freedoms rather than become a focus for full screening and medical services.

ACQUIRED IMMUNE DEFICIENCY SYNDROME

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

We must not overreact, however, AIDS is still relatively rare, and if you follow the guide lines 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 risks of AIDS well.

IS AIDS IN IRELAND?

Some Irish people have caught AIDS abroad but it is now also known that others have contacted the virus in Ireland. As the disease can take a long time to develop (possibly up to 6 years) it is not known how many are affected. We are recommending that all gay men should follow the "SAFER SEX" guidelines. This will reduce your own risk, and the risk of the virus spreading in the gay community. In this, as in other aspects of life, we all share a responsibility to each other.

HOW DO YOU GET AIDS?

In most cases, by sexual contact, or by using infected injection needles. It can also be passed by infected blood products.

It **cannot** be caught by social kissing, by touching, by drinking from another person's glass, or by shared bathroom or toilet facilities.

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. There is a test for anti-bodies in the blood but it only shows whether or not you have been in contact with the virus. It does not show whether any illness will develop, and it is therefore not a test for AIDS. The best advice is to take this test only when a doctor recommends it, as part of a diagnosis. People with AIDS become very obviously and seriously ill. If you feel very unwell for a prolonged time (several weeks), you should have a check-up at a local S.T.D. Clinic.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF THE ANTI-BODY TEST IS POSITIVE?

- Don't panic — most people stay well.
- Have sex only with your regular partner(s).
- With anyone else, follow the **COMPLETELY SAFE** sex guidelines.
- Have a second test done; they are not completely accurate.
- Talk with your doctor, or to the Gay Information Services, if you are anxious about anything.

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

- Again, don't panic — your risk is small. Consult a doctor at a S.T.D. (V.D.) Clinic.



WHY DO ONLY SOME PEOPLE WITH THE VIRUS GET AIDS?

No one is certain, but there are some ideas.

- Some peoples' 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)

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

Gay men, like people in other risk groups are asked **not to donate blood** or **not to carry an organ donor card**, until a real AIDS test is available. 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.

SAFER SEX — REDUCE THE RISKS

- Have sex with fewer partners.
- Avoid anal sex, except possibly with regular partner(s).
- Have sex with men who have few other sexual partners.
- Receiving other mens' semen into your body can give you the virus.
- Deep kissing seems highly unlikely to transmit the virus.
- Dry kissing, cuddling, massage, and mutual masturbation are **COMPLETELY SAFE**.
- Follow the **COMPLETELY SAFE** practices, if you are with a man who has had sex in high risk countries in the last 3 years.
- Condoms may help, but do not rely on them for protection.
- Rimming (mouth-to-anus contact) carries a high risk.

GAY HEALTH ACTION is a new 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; to campaign actively for comprehensive medical and social support services; and to provide a gay support group for people who need it.

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 — 301935
SIR PATRICK DUNS — 766942

BELFAST: ROYAL VICTORIA HOSPITAL — 220159

CORK: VICTORIA HOSPITAL 966844.

GALWAY: V.D. Clinic 64000

DERRY: ALTNAGELVIN HOSPITAL — 45171

OUR THANKS TO:-

- The Terrence Higgins Trust, London.
- Health Education Bureau.

If you want further information or want to be involved in the work of GAY HEALTH ACTION, contact your local group:-

GAY HEALTH ACTION
C/O P.O. BOX NO. 97, CORK.