

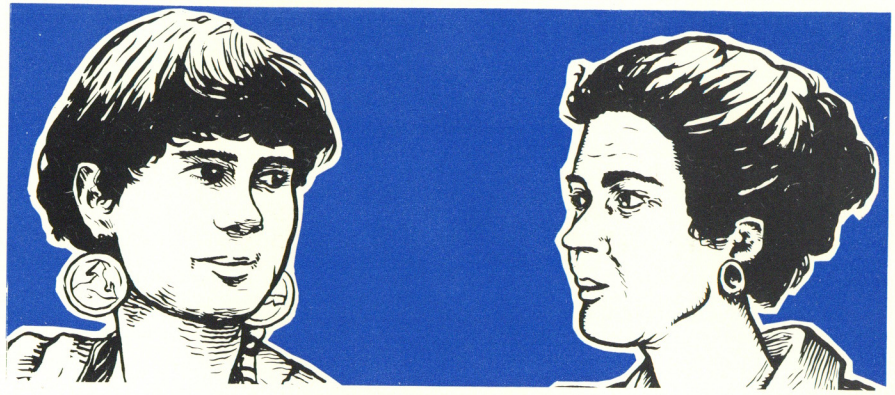
Time for women to think . . .

What is AIDS?

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is the name given to a series of conditions and infections which can occur as a late result of HIV (Human Immune–deficiency Virus) infection.

What is HIV?

HIV is the virus which can lead to AIDS. HIV is carried inside certain blood cells and multiplies within them, so once a person is infected he/she cannot get rid of the virus.



. . . and talk about HIV infection and AIDS.

Women and AIDS

AIDS is a worldwide problem affecting men, women and children. The World Health Organisation estimates that over twelve million cases of AIDS have already occurred. Over eight million people are now infected with the Human Immune-deficiency Virus (HIV), and over a third – **three million** – are women.

In Northern Ireland the number of people who are known to be infected with HIV is 76*, of which 12 are women. This figure is almost certainly lower than the true number of people who have been infected. 20* people, including two women, have developed AIDS and 17* people have died, two of whom were women.

But the impact of AIDS is not just a matter of numbers. AIDS affects women not only as individuals who may be infected with HIV, but also as providers of health care, educators, wives, mothers, partners and workers.

Jane Wilde

Dr. Jane Wilde
Executive Director
The Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland



** figures from DHSS, 31st October 1990.*

Why we need to talk about HIV/AIDS

Many people assume that as there is not a great local 'problem', there is no need for local action, yet the number of people who have HIV and AIDS here continues to grow, and there is every reason to expect this will continue.

Many of us don't want to talk about HIV and AIDS, because it concerns that area of life – sexual behaviour – which is private. We have been quite ready to see HIV and AIDS as a problem for others – to say that it relates to groups that are 'different', to activities which may be illegal and to people who have nothing to do with us.

In Northern Ireland we are very fortunate that, at this time, we don't have the same high level of HIV and AIDS as many other countries but HIV and AIDS **will** affect our lives. It will affect us because we ourselves will meet or care for people with HIV and AIDS. These could be our children, our friends, our neighbours or our work colleagues.

We need to talk **now** about how to care for people with AIDS, and most of all, we need to find out **ourselves** how to prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS.

The blood transfusion service is looking for new blood donors. Your husband says you wouldn't get him going in case he gets AIDS.

What would you do or say?

How can you get HIV infection?

There are three major ways in which the virus can get into the bloodstream*.

1. Through unprotected sex where blood, semen or vaginal fluid from an infected person enters the body of a partner.
2. By sharing needles and syringes with someone who is infected with the virus.
3. Through pregnancy if the mother is infected with the virus.

** There is **no** risk in giving blood. All the equipment used is sterile and only used once.*

What does HIV do to the body?

When the virus gets **into** the bloodstream, it begins to attack cells which are part of the body's defence or immune system. The system is there to help protect the body from getting diseases. Once the virus has weakened the system you can catch diseases which you would normally fight off – like pneumonia. These diseases then become serious enough to kill you.

You know that your best friend's husband is seeing other women. This increases his risk of getting and passing on HIV infection.

Would you say anything?

HIV and Pregnancy

About one third of babies born to mothers infected with HIV will be infected themselves and will go on to develop AIDS and die within the first two years of life.

The most common way for a baby to become infected with HIV is in the womb, although infection through breast feeding has occurred in a small number of cases.

You were shocked when you overheard a conversation about AIDS between your teenage son and his friends.

Do you talk to him about it?

What is testing for HIV?

It is a simple blood test which can be done by your GP or at special clinics in hospital.

If you are thinking of having a test it is important that you get professional advice beforehand about how having a test may affect your life insurance prospects, mortgage application and more importantly how a result either way, may affect you emotionally. At the moment, informed consent is needed before your blood is tested.

How to protect yourself from HIV infection

The fewer sexual partners you or your partner have, the less risk you have of coming into contact with the virus.

How you have sex can reduce the risk of getting the virus or passing it onto others. Using a condom can reduce your risk.

Never share needles or syringes.

Devices that puncture the skin, eg needles for tattooing or ear-piercing equipment may be infectious unless they have been properly sterilised. Always check.

You are out for the evening. One of the group, whom you don't know very well, accidently drinks from your glass. The mistake is acknowledged and you both laugh about it. Later a friend tells you she's heard that person may be HIV positive.

Do you feel worried?

Your eldest daughter (17 years) is learning about HIV and AIDS at school. Her sister (14 years) says she wants to learn too.

Do you think a 14 year old should know about AIDS?

A local market stall is offering free ear-piercing if you buy earrings. Since you don't have you ears pierced it seems too good a chance to miss. You can not be sure the equipment being used has been sterilised.

Do you get your ears pierced?

We would like to thank two local women who both have HIV infection for sharing their feelings so that others might understand how HIV can affect a person's life.

Women, late 20's single

"I put my head in my hands. I just cried and cried, I looked around at the four green walls and the small room, thinking this would be me for the rest of my life. It was when I got outside that it hit me. Everywhere I went I was convinced people were staring and knew I was HIV positive.

I'll never forget mummy's face. She looked at me as if I was going to die that instant. She only knew what she had seen on TV and as far as she was concerned it was a killer. My greatest hurt was her first reaction. She did separate washes, separate cups and wouldn't let me in the kitchen. She didn't know what she was doing to me, maybe she was trying to protect me. I thought she didn' t love me, that I was trash to her. It's taken HIV to make our family stop and think more about each other.

I can't easily dream of one day having a baby because of the possible risks to the baby, and who would agree to be the father! Starting new relationships is hard, because you always face rejection which is never easy to take. I can almost tell now how people are going to react to me. When I see that expression my heart just sinks into my chest. I feel hurt inside and very lost.

No matter where I am or who I'm with the thought of being HIV positive is always in my head. It would be lovely if for just five minutes I could be without it, just to get some rest".

Your son or daughter is going on holiday for 2 weeks with a group of friends.

Should you mention AIDS before they go?

?

If you had HIV infection, what would you think, how would you feel, what would you do?

Woman early 20's
Mother of two young children

"I was 7 months pregnant when I discovered I was HIV positive. I nearly dropped when the doctor told me. Strangely enough at the time I kept thinking how awful it must be for the doctor to have to tell me this, I wanted to reassure him and tell him it's alright and not to worry.

Afterwards when it hit me I just thought about my baby. I felt as if I had murdered her before she was even born.

I knew of no-one else who was like me. Even though some of my family knew, I felt so guilty about hurting them and letting them down that I couldn't share my honest feelings. When I met other people in Northern Ireland who were HIV positive it was like a huge weight being lifted off me. I remember meeting them and feeling the happiest I'd felt in a long time.

It felt like a miracle when my baby was born. The worry about whether she would be HIV positive seems to have brought me closer to her. Throughout the first two years of my daughter's life she was being constantly tested. I couldn't stand it.

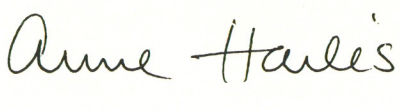
I 'll never forget the week of her second birthday. Her final test came through saying she was completely clear. Everything seemed to be coming together.

I still worry a great deal about my children and their future but I'm more optimistic than I've ever been.

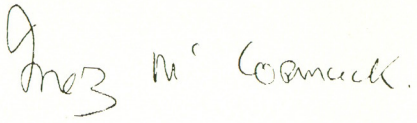
I feel hurt for my parents and I feel guilty. Imagine being told your daughter has 'the virus'. At least I can talk to others in similar positions, but who can my parents talk to? I wish people could allow my mother to share her pain."

We believe that everyone should be informed about HIV and AIDS. Everyone should understand how it can be prevented. Everyone should be aware that this problem is a problem for all of us. Education and action for prevention are our major weapons against its further spread. We can all play our part by recognising that the virus is here in Northern Ireland and women have an important role to play in education.

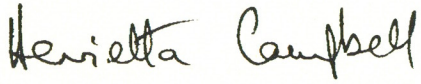
Together we can make a difference.



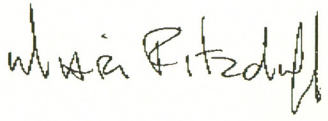
Anne Hailes
Broadcaster



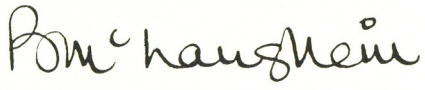
Inez M cCormack
Regional Organiser
National Union of Public Employees



Dr. Henrietta Campbell
Deputy Chief Medical Officer
Dept. of Health and Social Services



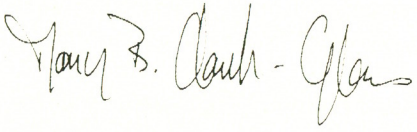
Dr. Mari Fitzduff
Director
Community Relations Council



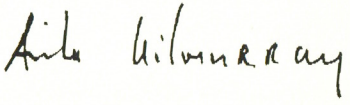
Brenda McLaughlin
Vice Chairman
Eastern Health and Sosial Services Board



Liz Comerton
Relaxation and Stress Lecturer



Mary Clark–Glass
Chair and Chief Executive
Equal Opportunities Commission
for Northern Ireland



Avila Kilmurray
Regional Women's Officer
Amalgamated Transport and
General Workers Union

Worldwide, the number of women affected by the virus will soon equal that of men. AIDS like pregnancy can result from only one sexual contact. Therefore having many different sexual partners greatly increases risk. At least one third of all babies born to infected women will go on to develop AIDS and die by the age of 2 years.

Although most people with HIV infection may appear perfectly well for long periods of time (up to 10 years) nearly all will go on to develop multiple infections and nearly all will die despite drug therapy.

The fact is that when we look at the numbers of people with sexually acquired HIV infection a much higher proportion of these are **women** in Northern Ireland than elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Dr. Paula Kilbane
Director of Public Health
Southern Health and Social Services Board

HIV/AIDS is a serious health issue facing women in Northern Ireland.

We hope this information has been useful to you, and that you will share it with others.

We would be pleased to supply any further copies you require. Please contact:

The Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland
The Beeches
12 Hampton Manor Drive
Belfast BT7 3EN
Telephone: (0232) 644811 Ext. 203

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Organisations which provide advice and information in Northern Ireland

AIDS Helpline (NI)
PO Box 206, Belfast BT1 1SJ.
Telephone: (0232) 326117
Telephone counselling service.
Monday, Wednesday, Friday – 7.30pm to 10.00pm
Saturday – 2.00pm to 5.00pm

The Helpline offers support and advice to those who have concerns and queries about HIV or AIDS.

National AIDS Helpline
Telephone: 0800 567123 (Freephone)

Body Positive Group
c/o AIDS Helpline (NI) address as above.
Telephone: (0232) 235515
Telephone service available Monday to Friday 11.00am to 4.00pm.

The Body Positive group is a self help group of people with HIV or AIDS which offers emotional and practical support and advice to those who have HIV or AIDS.

Genito Urinary Medicine Clinic
Royal Victoria Hospital, Grosvenor Road, Belfast
Telephone: (0232) 320159

The clinic provides information, counselling and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases (STD's).

No appointment necessary. Strict confidentiality.

Voluntary Positive Care Group

This is a relatively new group. The service is primarily offered in the Greater Belfast area. Referral is through the Royal Victoria Hospital. Where resources permit, the service will extend to areas outside Greater Belfast. This group aims to provide a confidential support service which includes hospital visiting and home support for people with HIV and AIDS, their partners, families and friends.

Information may also be obtained from the Health Promotion/Education Departments of the four Area Health and Social Services Boards.

HEALTH PROMOTION AGENCY NORTHERN IRELAND

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