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HIV POLICY		

Definition

HIV is a global health epidemic and has killed over thirty-nine million people worldwide, according to the World Health Organization. As of 2013, WHO estimates that over thirty-five million people live with HIV worldwide. Most of these people live in low-income and developing countries. Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for nearly 70 percent of new HIV infections.

HIV transmits through unprotected sexual intercourse, through sharing of contaminated needles and between an infected mother and her baby during pregnancy and breastfeeding, according to WHO. People cannot get infected through casual contact, such as kissing, shaking hands, or sharing personal objects with a person with HIV.

After a person is infected, there is an incubation period in which there are no symptoms present. This period can last from a few months to 10 years, according to WebMD.

Human immunodeficiency virus, or HIV, is the virus that causes AIDS. In the UK it is estimated there are more than 100,000 people living with HIV. Around a quarter of people with HIV do not know they have the condition. HIV weakens a person's ability to fight infections and cancer. HIV transmission can occur during unprotected sex or needle sharing. Symptoms of HIV vary widely, with some infected people not showing any signs or symptoms. There is no HIV cure, although medications can delay the onset of AIDS.

How is HIV Transmitted?

If a person who has HIV has unprotected sex with an uninfected partner, then the uninfected partner is at risk of developing the virus. The virus is spread when infected bodily fluids come into contact with the mucous membranes or damaged tissues of someone who is not already infected with the disease. HIV may also be spread by using contaminated needles or drug equipment.

Most commonly, HIV is spread through unprotected sex, or by sharing needles or drug equipment with multiple people. Out of all sexual behaviour, *anal* sex poses the highest risk of transmitting HIV, and *vaginal* sex – the second highest. People who have multiple sexual partners are also at a greater risk of developing the disease at some point in their lives.

Less commonly, HIV can be transmitted through blood transfusions or organ transplants. It may also be transmitted to babies born to mothers who are infected with the disease or by being pierced with sharp objects or penetrated with contaminated needles in health care settings.

What are the Symptoms of HIV?

Many people experience flu-like symptoms around two to four weeks following exposure to HIV. The symptoms can last a few days or weeks. These symptoms are known as *acute retroviral syndrome* or *primary HIV infection*,

and they occur as part of the body's response to the infection. Although it may be too early for HIV to show up in an HIV test, those who have contracted the virus can still transmit it to others during this time. In fact, this is the most transmissible period for HIV.

Some people remain asymptomatic following infection.

Normally, the virus lays dormant and inactive during what is known as HIV's *clinical latency period*. The virus is still active but does not reproduce at high levels. Symptoms may not even be noticed during latency. Clinical latency could continue for decades if those infected opt for *antiretroviral therapy*. However, once the immune system has reached a certain threshold of damage, AIDS symptoms begin to occur, and the body becomes more vulnerable to infections and cancers.

What is the difference between HIV and AIDS?

Exposure to HIV can lead to an infection that attacks the immune system. AIDS develops in an HIV patient whose immune system has been severely compromised or damaged. Symptoms of AIDS vary among patients, but common examples include pneumonia, tuberculosis, specific types of cancer and other related infections. As of 2015, (*anything more recent available?*) there is no cure for HIV, and the immune system is unable to fight and completely rid the body of the infection, even if the patient never develops AIDS.

Taking a saliva or blood test that looks for antigens or antibodies that the body produces to fight the virus can determine if a person has been infected with HIV. Diagnosing AIDS requires counting the body's CD4 cells and looking for opportunistic infections.

Myths about HIV/AIDS

You cannot get HIV from ...

- **Someone who does not have HIV** — you can only get HIV from someone who is already infected with the disease.
- **Touching someone who has HIV** — HIV cannot survive outside of the body, so you will not get HIV from hugging someone, or shaking their hand.
- **Sweat, tears, urine, or faeces of someone who has HIV** — there is no HIV in the aforementioned excretions of an infected person.
- **Mutual Masturbation** — fingering and hand-jobs are all safe from HIV. However, if using sex toys, a new condom should be used when switching between partners.
- **Insects** — you cannot get HIV from insects. When an insect (such as a mosquito) bites you it sucks your blood - it does not inject the blood of the last person it bit.
- **Air** — HIV cannot survive in the air so coughing, sneezing, or spitting cannot transmit HIV.
- **New or Sterilised Needles** — new needles cannot transmit HIV because they have not been in the body of an infected person. If used needles are cleaned and sterilised properly, they cannot transmit HIV either.
- **Water** — HIV cannot survive in water, so you will not get HIV from swimming pools, baths, shower areas or from drinking water, nor from toilet seats, tables, door handles, cutlery or sharing towels.
- **Surfaces** — HIV does not survive on surfaces, so you cannot get HIV from touching them.
- **Musical Instruments** — HIV cannot survive on musical instruments. Even if it is an instrument that you play using your mouth, it cannot give you HIV.

- **Used Condoms** – HIV can only survive for a short amount of time outside of the body. Even if the condom you touched had sperm from an HIV-positive person in it, the HIV would be dead.
- **Kissing** – there is such a small amount of HIV in the saliva of an infected person that HIV cannot be passed on from kissing. There is only a risk if you both have large open sores or bleeding gums, and blood is exchanged.
- **Oral Sex** – as with kissing, the risk of HIV from oral sex is small unless you have or your partner has large open sores on the genital area or bleeding gums /sores in the mouth.

Precautions to take when working with HIV infected people

HIV Caregiver: Duties and Risks

There are many tasks that caregivers take on in caring for those with HIV or AIDS. Some pose a risk of infection, while others do not. Here are some typical caregiver responsibilities and possible risks and precautions for each:

- **Toileting** — If you are helping someone to go to the bathroom, there is very little risk involved because the virus is not transmitted through urine or faeces. To protect against the possibility that there may be blood in the urine or faeces, however, be sure to wear gloves and other skin protection when cleaning up after helping someone use the toilet or a bedpan.
- **Feeding** — Precautions are not needed for feeding someone with HIV because the virus cannot be transmitted through saliva.
- **Bathing and hygiene** — If someone cuts or injures himself / herself while shaving or in the shower, you will need to take precautions when dressing the wound and cleaning up the blood. Blood will transmit HIV, so wear gloves when treating any wounds and cleaning up the area. Also, never share razors or other sharp objects with anyone who has HIV.
- **Cleaning up vomit** — If someone has been sick, you are not at risk cleaning up vomit unless there is blood in it. If there is blood in the vomit, wear gloves and other skin protection while cleaning up.
- **Cleaning up body fluids** — If blood, semen, or other infectious body fluids have come into contact with any surface, it is important to clean it properly to kill the virus and reduce your risk of infection. If you know a surface has been contaminated with blood or body fluids clean it with a 10 percent bleach solution.

In Summary, normal hygiene practices will offer protection from HIV.

Legislation

Since 2003 anyone with a diagnosis of HIV is protected by law under the *Disability Discrimination Act (DOA)* and cannot be discriminated against on the grounds that they are HIV positive. This includes the right to remain in employment.

Civil Law covers the right of an individual to keep their HIV status confidential. If someone believes that their personal information is being unlawfully disclosed, they may be able to rely upon the civil law of confidentiality. If someone tells, or attempts to tell, anyone about an individual's HIV status without his or her consent after this has been shared in confidence, this is likely to be regarded as a 'breach of confidence'.

It is therefore imperative that if a young person being cared for by SJD Homes is HIV-positive that the information be shared with as few members of staff as possible and the young person's consent be obtained prior to any further disclosure.

A young person may be encouraged to share the information with others e.g., their education provider, but the final decision is theirs and must be respected.

