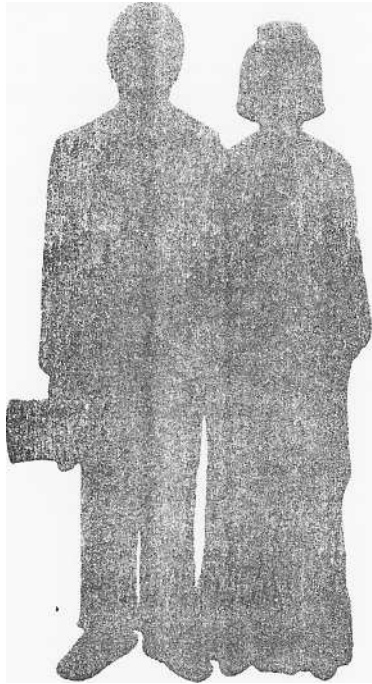


Getting Married? Facts about AIDS!



This pamphlet explains basic facts about AIDS for couples. After reading, discuss this with your future spouse. If you still have questions, talk to your doctor or call one of the numbers listed inside.

AIDS Information Series

Massachusetts

Department of Public Health

What is AIDS?

"AIDS" is short for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, a disease that breaks down the immune system. It leaves the body defenseless against a variety of infections and cancers. AIDS is caused by a virus called "HIV," short for Human Immunodeficiency Virus.

What are the symptoms of infection with the AIDS virus?

Most people infected with the AIDS virus have no symptoms at all and feel perfectly healthy. Some people develop swollen glands, tiredness, fever, loss of weight and appetite, diarrhea, night sweats, white spots in the mouth or purplish blotches on the skin. These are also the symptoms of many common illnesses, so they are **not** sure signs of AIDS. However, if you have symptoms like these for more than two weeks you should see a doctor.

How is the AIDS virus spread?

HIV, the AIDS virus, is spread two ways: by having sex with an infected person and by contact with infected blood. The virus can also be passed from an infected mother to her unborn or newborn infant. HIV is not spread by the kind of public social contact that people have with friends and co-workers.

Before 1985, some people were infected by transfusions of contaminated blood or blood products. Since July 1985, all donated blood is tested for HIV infection. Transfusions are now safer than ever before.

Are you at risk for AIDS?

You are at greatest risk of infection if you:

- have had unprotected sex with another person. . have shared needles or "works" to inject drugs.
- received transfusions or blood products between 1978 and July 1985.
- have had sex with any of the people described above.

Note: When used correctly, latex condoms plus a "nonoxynol 9" spermicide can be a good barrier against the AIDS virus. **Birth control pills, diaphragms, and IUDs do not protect against infection.**

Is there a test for AIDS?

There is a blood test for the antibodies that your body makes to fight infection by the AIDS virus (HIV), but this is not a test for the disease itself. The antibodies usually show up in the blood between 3 to 6 months after infection by HIV. The blood test cannot tell you whether or not you have AIDS. It can only tell you whether or not you have been infected by the virus.

Where can you be tested?

You can be tested by your own doctor, who will send your blood to a laboratory licensed by the Department of Public Health. For your protection, state law requires your written permission before anyone can test your blood for HIV antibodies or report your test results to anyone but you. If you or your future spouse are thinking about being tested, you should discuss it with your doctor.

If for some reason you do not want to be tested by your doctor, you can use the Alternative Test Site Program. This is a free program, sponsored by the Department of Public Health that offers anonymous testing and counseling.

What do the test results mean?

Having HIV antibodies in your blood (a "positive" test) means:

You probably are infected with the virus.

--and--

Even if you never get sick, you can infect others by sharing needles or having sex without using rubbers. If you get pregnant, your baby might be infected.

--and--

You might eventually get AIDS or a related sickness. .

--but--

It does not mean you have AIDS. Right now there is no way to predict which infected people will get sick and which will not.

Not having HIV antibodies in your blood (a "negative" test) means:

You probably are not infected with the virus.

--or--

You were infected recently and haven't developed antibodies yet.

--but--

It does not mean you will never get AIDS. You can still become infected if you put yourself at risk by sharing needles or having unsafe sex.

Is AIDS testing required for persons getting married?

No.

Is AIDS education required for persons getting married?

Yes. It is now required by a regulation of the Department of Public Health that city and town clerks distribute to marriage license applicants an AIDS educational pamphlet. The contents of the pamphlet should be discussed as part of the required premarital medical evaluation for syphilis.

Want more information?

All calls are confidential.

Drug Treatment Information
Statewide, toll-free: 1-800-327-5050
City of Boston: (617) 445-1500

AIDS Information
Statewide, toll free:
1-800-235-2331*
1-800-637-3776 (Spanish/English)
City of Boston: (617) 424-5916
AIDS Action Hotline: (617) 536-7733

HIV Testing Information
Department of Public Health
(617) 727-6971
1-800-750-2016

U.S. Public Health Service Hotline
1-800-342-AIDS

*TDD