

AIDS - BLACK DEATH OF THE XXI CENTURY

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Secondary immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) is caused by a virus and characterized by severe immune deficiency resulting in opportunistic infections, malignancies, and neurological lesion.

AIM: to describe the major ways of transmission the infection, the dangers for the human life and the precautions health care workers can take to avoid getting infected.

MATERIALS and METHODS: The major transmission routes of HIV are sexual contact, parenteral exposure to blood and blood products and perinatal transmission. Extensive laboratory research and epidemiological studies indicate that HIV is not transmitted by shaking hands, hugging, kissing, contacting bodily secretion such as sweat, mucus (as in sneezing or coughing) or saliva. The time from exposure to HIV until the onset of the acute clinical illness is typically 2 to 4 weeks. Patients report fever, lethargy, fatigue, headaches, retro-orbital pain, sore throat, muscular pain, occasional diarrhea, rash and the swollen lymph nodes. In the late stages of HIV infection the nervous system becomes highly susceptible to a wide array of disorders involving brain, spinal cord, peripheral nerve and muscle. Skin disease is an extremely common complication of HIV infection, affecting up to 90% of persons. The first test developed to detect HIV infection was isolation of the virus through tissue culture. Most infections occur as a result of repeated and close contacts with a carrier of HIV, specifically mucous membrane contact with blood or body fluids. Sexual relationships are the major source of such contacts, and people must be educated to modify sexual practices, to avoid sexual encounters with persons in high-risk groups, reduce the number and frequency of sexual contacts, use protective devices. HIV carriers and persons belonging to a high-risk group should not donate their blood (or organs for transplantation), and should inform medical and dental professionals of their status.

CONCLUSION: AIDS patients are particularly contagious to hospital personnel and patients, their body fluids and blood should be handled with extreme care, following the same procedures used with patients who carry hepatitis B virus.