

HIV/AIDS Advocacy

AFRICA AND HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS AWARENESS

When AIDS was first identified in 1981, health officials estimated that 5 to 10 percent, or more of those who had the virus would get the disease and die. But the virus proved to have a long incubation period. It may take five years or more for symptoms to become apparent. Now with the experience of the past eight years, some officials are estimating that 40-50 percent, or more of those carrying the AIDS virus will develop the disease and die.

AIDS AND AFRICA AND OTHER THIRD WORLD NATION STATE:

A computer model is said to predict that 50% of HIV carriers will develop full blown AIDS in five years and 75% in seven years. (The term HIV, come from the words "Human Immunodeficiency Virus", (the AIDS virus).

Many medical experts and a majority of virologists now believe that the death toll among HIV-carriers will approach very close to 100%. The belief that all will eventually die is based partly on the fact that as every year goes by, more people who contracted the virus three or four or five years ago do indeed develop the disease. And it is based partly on the studies of HIV virus itself. Of course such views are estimates. Only time will tell if they will be realized in actual fact.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, at the National Institutes of Health in the United States, noted that about 90% of individual who test positive for HIV antibodies have some sort of immune function impairment within five years. Even if only 50 percent die of the 50-100 million virus carriers projected for the future, it would mean million of deaths each year, sometime in the next decade. One source put the projected death toll in Africa alone as possibly tens of millions. This will speed up the destruction process. Besides all the sufferings leading to death, now Africa must really brace itself up for mass burials. This is shocking indeed. The consequences of the AIDS plague in lives lost, in damage to society and in financial cost are being compared to the consequences of major wars. For example, In the United States, about 40,000 have already died. From one million to two million more are said to be infected. In New York City alone an estimated 250,000 to 400,000 residents have the virus. In some parts of the city AIDS has become the most common infection disease in newborn babies.

While the rate of increase in the United State has slowed in some high-risk groups and the feared explosion of AIDS among hetero-sexual has not come to pass, the number of deaths will still be very high in the near future. The US centers for Disease Control in Atlanta estimates that by the end of 1991, over 200,000 Americans will have died from AIDS. In the year 1991 it was expected that over 50,000 will die from it. And by the end of 1992 only four years, more Americans may have died from AIDS than died in world War 11, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War combined.

In fact, The Futurist states: **AIDS may kill more people by the end of this century than have been killed by all our wars (of all the nations).** The projected costs are staggering. In the United States the estimate is s 50,000 or more per year for each patient. So in the years ahead many billions of dollars will be required annually to pay for patient care.

If this huge sum of money is for one patient's care and then how can Africa cure her children? That's why many will die in Africa. Young men and women must be informed. Abstinence from sexual intercourse from unknown partners must be encouraged. Protection must be made available to all those active in sexual desires. It is a pity. Africans do not have enough foreign exchange to import the necessary items for the population. Education must be the best tool.

Movies showing those dying from AIDS will also help.

WORSE IN AFRICA

In Africa, few, if any, wars have ever done what AIDS is now doing. Britain's New Scientist observes: **"AIDS is running rampant through Africa"**. An article in Politician of Denmark said "Uganda's chief AIDS official's states, unless something changes, every second an adult in this country will be HIV- positive.

Almost half of all the AIDS cases in Africa are women in their child bearing years. Children account for one of every five AIDS cases in Rwanda. In Zambia, 6,000 babies will be born with AIDS. Among eight hundred prostitutes tested in Nairobi, nine out of 10 were infected with HIV and these women sleep with an average of 1,000 customers per year.

If we do nothing, the continent will die, says Pieter Poit, a Belgian expert. Jonathan Mann, who heads the WHO campaign states, "The alternative is to give up on Africa, as if the world were not a single plane. But the epidemic cannot be stopped in any one country before it is stopped in all of them".

Thus, many medical authorities feel that a global AIDS catastrophe has already begun. UN secretary - General Javier Perez de Cuellar called it a "global conflict" that threatens us with all the consequences of war.

In some ways it is worse than war. Why? Because no end is in sight, the casualties continue to mount, and the "wounded" are not recovering.

WHY AIDS SO DEADLY

To understand better how to protect ourselves from AIDS, we need to know why it is so deadly. What makes this virus more difficult to deal with than other virus?

Viruses are the smallest of all disease- producing organisms, much smaller than bacteria, influenza, polio, and the common cold are produced by different viruses. Once inside a host cell, a virus may kill the cell or merely "sleep" there until it becomes more active later. With the AIDS virus, it may take five or more years before symptoms develop.

WHY SO DEADLY

What makes the AIDS virus so deadly is the fact that it attacks and disables key cells, including white blood cells that the body produces to help ward off diseases. These white blood cells (called T-4 Lymphocytes) are the body's main defense against disease.

When these white cells are disabled by the AIDS virus, they cannot do their job. Thus, the body's immune system is devastated. Infections that may not previously have been life-threatening now are. These include other viruses, parasites, bacteria, fungi, and various cancers.

Since the body is no longer able to fight these infections they progress until the victim is dead. These infections are called opportunistic. They take advantage of the opportunity afforded to them by the body's suppressed immune system. A person with AIDS may have several such infections at the same time.

Among the early symptoms of AIDS are prolonged unexplained fatigues, swollen glands that last for months, persistent fevers of night sweats, persistent diarrhoea, and unexplained weight loss: discoloured lesions of the skin or mucous membranes that do not go away, a persistent, unexplained cough, a thick whitish coating on the tongue or in the throat, easy bruising or unexplained bleeding. These early symptoms are often referred to as "AIDS" Related Complex" or ARC. When AIDS becomes full-blown, deadly diseases develop. Among the more common are lung infections caused by parasitic germ known as PNEUMOCYSTIS CARINI, and the skin cancer called Kaposi's sarcoma, which also involves internal organs. In addition, the AIDS virus can affect the brain, causing paralysis, blindness dementia, and eventual death. Dr. Richard T. Johnson, a John Hopkins professor of neurology, stated "HIV (the AIDS virus) is in the brains of at least 1 million people in the US".

Full-blown AIDS is accompanied by pain and uncontrollable weight loss with the body getting weaker and weaker until death ensues. In Africa, says The Lancet, AIDS "has been associated with the 'slim disease', a term that describes the great loss of weight that accompanies diarrhoea". From the onset of the disease to death it may take a year or less or several years.

FACTORS THAT PREPARE THE WAY FOR AIDS

According to the British medical journal, The Lancet, each year more than 300 million additional people throughout the world become infected with sexually transmitted diseases, such as gonorrhea, syphilis, herpes and chlamydia. These may weaken the body, perhaps making it even more susceptible to the AIDS virus. Recreational or illegal drug use too may make the body less resistant to AIDS.

Also, in underdeveloped lands the lack of good nutrition due to poverty and the lack of adequate health-care facilities works against the building of the body's resistance to AIDS. The health of hundreds of millions in those areas is already substandard, making it easier for the virus to claim additional victims.

A persistent virus

There is another factor that contributes to making the AIDS virus more deadly than others. It has built-in mechanisms for survival not common to other viruses. For example, in humans, the influenza virus may last only a few days or weeks, and it stimulates antibodies that help to protect the victim from further infection by that particular virus. Once the epidemic runs its course, it disappears. The flu pandemic of 1918 lasted only about a year. The yellow fever virus depends on mosquitoes, which diminish in number with seasonal changes. Smallpox may also run through a susceptible population and then disappear.

However, the AIDS virus is presumed to be persistent. It probably stays inside the human host for a lifetime and does not appear on its own. The victim does not recover from the full-blown AIDS disease and so is unable to build the kind of immunity that would resist a recurrence.

Furthermore, the AIDS virus has shown significant variation in its genetic composition, making it more difficult to develop a vaccine. And viruses usually mutate, that is change their character. For example, there are many different types of influenza and cold viruses. Already, a second type of AIDS virus has been identified in Africa and elsewhere. A different vaccine may be required for each type.

But why has AIDS spread so widely? What practices were involved that helped its insidious infiltration into the human family?

WHY HAS AIDS SPREAD SO WIDELY?

Why has AIDS become so widespread?

While it is not certain exactly how, when, or where it originated, there are general patterns that explain its spread. In the United States and Europe, for example, the main avenue for spreading AIDS was male homosexual activity. When the epidemic was first identified, it appeared almost exclusively among homosexual (and bisexual) men. Until recently, over 70% of adult victims were homosexual men.

Then AIDS began to appear among intravenous drug users. In a few years over 15% of all cases came from this group, which is getting larger. In some places, half of all intravenous drug users have the AIDS virus. Thus, Science magazine stated: "That great majority of Americans infected today are either homosexual men or intravenous drugs users"

In San Francisco, 50% or more of homosexual men have the AIDS virus. The city's homosexual community is being devastated by AIDS deaths. A long term study of homosexual men have shown that of those diagnosed as having the AIDS virus seven years ago 78% had either full-blown AIDS, earlier symptoms of it or some immune impairment. And while the rate of new cases among homosexuals has decreased, there is little that can be done for those already infected. In Haiti, the Los Angeles Times noted: "New data suggest that the AIDS virus was introduced into the Caribbean primarily by homosexual contact between islanders and Americans".

WHY SO SUSCEPTIBLE

Why are homosexuals so susceptible to AIDS? Because of their sex practices. While AIDS is also spread by oral intercourse, it is the practice of anal intercourse (sodomy) that has been the primary way of passing AIDS among homosexuals.

The human anus was designed for elimination of waste excrement and not for sexual intercourse. It has only a thin layer of epithelial cells the tissue that lines the anus. Anal intercourse results in a tearing of this lining and in bleeding fissures. Infected semen going into the rectum from the partner can provide a source of AIDS, as can abrasions and lesions on the male organ. Also, the damaged rectal tissues of the recipient permit infected secretions to pass the infection onto other sex partner.

In addition, homosexuals often have many partners - hundreds, even thousands - in a life time. One young homosexual who infected many others before dying from AIDS was reported to have had 2,500 homosexual contacts with men in ten years. His job with an airline enabled him to travel extensively. Another claimed to have some 5,000 homosexual contacts in 20 years. The possibility that such people will spread AIDS is obvious.

Another factor is that because of their sexual practices other diseases such as hepatitis, gonorrhea, and herpes are common among homosexuals. These diseases damage the body and, it is thought, make it more susceptible to AIDS. Homosexual thus cannot simply be passed off as an "alternate life - style". It is unnatural, a perversion of the way we were created. The Bible includes it among actions that result from "a disapproved mental state" and says: "God gave them up to disgraceful sexual appetites, for both their females changed the natural uses of themselves into one contrary to nature, and likewise even the males, left lust toward one another, males with males working what is obscene and receiving in themselves the full recompense, which was due for their error"Romans 1:26-32.

Also, God's Law to the nation of ancient Israel stated: "When a man lies down with a male the same as one lies with a women, both of them have done a detestable thing". Leviticus 20:13.

That homosexuality is unnatural can be seen from this basic fact: If everyone were exclusively homosexual, the human race would die out in one generation.

Is this to say, as some have suggested, that God is bringing the AIDS plague on homosexuals? No, the Bible does not say that. Instead, it is a matter of their "reaping what they are sowing" (Galatians 6:7). God's Word states this principle: "They have acted ruinously on their own part.... the defect is their own" Deuteronomy 32: 5.

Heterosexuals Also Infected.

However, AIDS is not just a homosexual diseases, it has also spread to heterosexual men and women. One way is by means of bisexual men who become infected from sexual contacts with other men and then infect women with whom they have intercourse.

Intravenous drug users who share contaminated syringes and needles also pass AIDS on to others. They can then infect the men or women with whom they have sexual relations. In many places a high percentages of prostitutes have AIDS and pass it on to their customers.

In Africa, AIDS is widespread among heterosexuals. As many women as men have it. While the spread of AIDS among heterosexuals in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere is not yet as rampant as in Africa, it is increasing in that group too. So more and more women and men who are not homosexuals or bisexual are getting AIDS and passing it on to others. A report stated: "AIDS has become the number one killer of women aged 25-34 in New York City". And sadly, a large number.... some say about 50 percent of women carrying the AIDS virus are giving birth to babies who have the disease.

Because there has been a permissive attitude toward sexual morality during the past few years, fornication and adultery have become common place. Men and women often have different sex partners. And those who are infected with AIDS can pass it on to others. Such promiscuous behavior is also condemned in the Bible. 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10. Revelation 22:15.

BLOOD - Another source of infection

Others were infected by blood transfusions. The Medical Post of Canada reports : "Dr. Thomas Peterman, a medical epidemiologist with the AIDS branch of the centers for Disease Control....estimated that 12,000 Americans became infected with HIV from contaminated blood transfusions from 1978-1984".

In Africa, it is reported that some 10 percent of all men and women who have the AIDS virus received it through infected blood transfusions or the use of contaminated needles, such as in vaccination. Since some estimate that there may be some five millions AIDS carriers in Africa, this could mean that there are over 500,000 people in Central Africa who got the AIDS virus from contaminated Blood.

With AIDS so widespread now, what can people do to protect themselves?

HOW TO AVOID AIDS

Many government and private agencies have educational campaigns to help people learn how to avoid AIDS. However, what is often missing in such advice is any moral consideration. Rarely is any appeal made to avoid a practice because it is morally wrong?

Regarding this TV commentator, Ted Koppel said to a University graduating class: "We have actually convinced ourselves that slogan will save us. Shoot up (drugs) if you must, but use clean needles. Enjoy sex whenever and with whomever you wish but wear a condom, No. The answer is no. Not because it isn't cool or smart or because you might end up in jail or dying in an AIDS ward, but no because it's wrong, because we have spent 5,000 years as a race of rational human beings..... searching for truth and moral absolute. In its purest form, truth is not a polite tap on the shoulder. It is howling reproach. What Moses brought down from Mount Sinai were not the Ten suggestions".

THE WAY TO AVOID AIDS

The AIDS plague could have been avoided. As the New York Times magazine said: "It is the first plague in the history of mankind whose regulation is entirely dependent upon our knowing behavior".

To avoid AIDS, a cardinal rule must be: Live a moral life. This means no sexual relations outside of marriage and no illicit drugs use.

"There must be no intercourse before marriage. It must take place only after knowing each partner very well. There must be a complete background check of each partner-hospital records if possible".

Very few who live moral lives get AIDS .True, one marriage mate may be moral, but the other mate may be immoral and infected with AIDS and may thus pass on the disease to the innocent mate. Of course, an innocent mate who suspects the other of immorality or drugs abuse has the right to take protective steps. The innocent are not required, as it were to commit suicides.

"knowing one's partner very well, is the answer". This goes well for the youth of Africa. The sexual revolution in the past has ended unfortunately. It is now a choice to live or to die. **"It is the choice to live and enjoy the beauty of being created by God".**

Is it really possible, however, to "know your partner" in this permissive world that has winked at immorality? How can you be certain that your partner has not been sexually immoral or has been a drug abuser and exposed to AIDS?

What is needed is education that moves people to hate what is morally wrong, and regardless of today's permissive views, sex outside of marriage is immoral, as is illicit drug use. These practices can lead to sickness and premature death.

Yes, accepting the Creator's standards for human behavior is the best way to avoid AIDS.

"Oh, God help us control our urge and to be strong to say no to that devil of insatiable desire"

Why should people die if they have known the right thing or the natural way of culture? Africa must wake up and fight the disease or ways of educating the youth of Africa.

Public health education is crucial. Through Global Leaders Foundation, we hope to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS in Africa, teaching people to prevent and control the spread of HIV/AIDS as well as promoting safe and healthy lifestyles. We are also looking for committed volunteers to help advocate.