

REASONS FOR HOPE

Download the lowdown

Use the Internet to find treatment information—even if you don't own a computer

by The AIDS Writers Group

Knowledge of HIV is growing and changing daily. One way to keep up on HIV treatments is the Internet, which offers a vast resource for information on HIV treatment through Web sites, newsgroups, mailing lists and more.

Many people may think this information doesn't apply to them, because they don't have a computer that is connected to the Net or they have little experience using a computer. However, many

HIV/AIDS

people are finding that they can access this information and get on line free with the help of computers at public libraries or local colleges and universities.

INTERNET BASICS AND THE WEB

The Internet is an enormous collection of interconnected computer networks. To get on line you will need access to a computer with Internet capabilities that is connected to an Internet service provider, such as America Online or CompuServe. The best known segment of the Internet is the World Wide Web. The Web is a vast and ever-growing collection of what are called sites, which consist of a page or a collection of pages that you can access with a browser. A browser (such as Netscape Navigator or Microsoft Internet Explorer) is a software application that allows you to get around on the Net, and to view the pictures and text on the various Web sites.

Each Web site has its own unique Internet address, called a uniform resource locator, or URL. If you know the exact address of the Web site you want, it's usually just an easy step to enter the URL into the address or location box on the Web browser. Hit enter, and within seconds you are connected to that site. If you are looking for a specific Web site but don't know its address, then you can do a search using any of a number of search engines.

Search engines (such as Excite, Yahoo! or Infoseek) are tools that to allow you to search through vast amounts of information on the Web by typing in key words or even general ideas. When the search is completed, the engine provides you with numerous links (or hypertext options) to articles or sites on the Web that match your request. All you need to do is place the cursor (or arrow) on the link hypertext, click the mouse and the browser will instantly move to that Web page. Sometimes links appear as a specific symbol to click on, but often they are just underlined or highlighted words. (Once you have visited a particular site, many Web browsers will display that link in a different color, to remind you where you've been.) Some search engines take a bit of practice to use well, but once you get used to them, they can save a lot of time and help you find information you otherwise might never have found.

There are a great many Web sites, and a growing number of them deal with HIV and HIV treatment. Many HIV sites are personal, some are set up by government agencies, others are commercial, while still others are run by nonprofit organizations such as AIDS service and advocacy organizations. The information provided by these sites can range from basic facts on HIV and HIV infection to the most complex scientific knowledge on the virus. Whether you have just tested



positive and are in search of answers to the many questions you may have about HIV infection, or you are a researcher who wishes to study the genetic structure of HIV, there are certain to be Web sites that can meet your needs. And if one site does not have what you are looking for, most offer links to other sites.

JUST STARTING OUT

If you are looking for basic, easily digestible information on HIV treatment or living with HIV, there are a number of Web sites with much to offer. (See the box for the addresses of all sites mentioned below.)

One site with a lot of information written at a very basic and understandable level is the AIDS Treatment Data Network. On it you will find the network's newsletter and fact sheets on HIV drugs and opportunistic infections. ATDN has one of the better links pages around, because it includes a brief description of the other sites, so you can figure out whether there is one that might be of interest to you. ATDN's clinical trials page is possibly the most comprehensive and comprehensible on the Web—equal, if not superior to the U.S. government's own site, ACTIS (AIDS Clinical Trials Information Service).

Another site that has a lot of fairly basic information is called The Body. This site offers

advice to those who have just tested positive, and includes an interactive service where you can ask scientific experts in the field of HIV questions on treatment issues.

A somewhat more detailed site with lots to offer is AEGIS (AIDS Education Global Information Service). AEGIS is the oldest and perhaps best-known HIV Web site. For those who are newly infected, AEGIS also has a 'starter kit' known as "AIDS 101." In addition, AEGIS offers Newsline, which features daily news reports on AIDS from a wide variety of sources such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and wire services. AEGIS also has an extensive treatment library and its own search engine to help you find specific information on its site.

Other Web sites with thorough and easily understood HIV treatment information include Project Inform's extensive site and the Community AIDS Treatment Information Exchange, or CATIE, an interesting Canadian site.

HIV IN DEPTH

For those of you looking for a more in-depth understanding of HIV treatment there are more-advanced sites, including some geared toward medical professionals but which can provide information for others as well. HIV Insite offers a textbook called the AIDS Knowledge Base, and an Antiretroviral Drug Database that includes information from dosages to drug interactions on most HIV drugs, approved or in development. The International Association of Physicians in AIDS Care also has a comprehensive site that addresses the concerns of doctors in treating their patients.

Another use for the Web is that it allows you to follow the events at important HIV medical conferences. It is often at such conferences that significant treatment breakthroughs are first reported. Many conferences set up their own Web sites where you can view abstracts, or even hear recorded conference presentations. Other Web sites, such as National AIDS Treatment Advocacy Project and Healthcare Communications Group, offer daily, easy-to-understand reports from many of these conferences.

A final cautionary note on the information you find on the World Wide Web. Although the Web is a great place to find the most up-to-date treatment information, HIV standards of treatment continue to change. Always take note of the publication date of any information you download off the Web, to be sure that it reflects the latest standards of care. In addition, remember that seeing something on the Net does not make it accurate. It's always a good idea to check for confirmation before acting on the information.

No one article can sum up all of the HIV treatment information available on the Net. What is important to understand is that the Net has brought each of us that much closer to the information we seek. More people are using the Net, so there are new Web sites and newsgroups going up all the time. If you haven't tried the Net to keep updated on the latest on HIV and HIV treatment, now is the time.

The AIDS Writers Group consists of Robert Folan and Lou Pesce of ACT UP-Boston; and David Scondras, Robert Krebs, Derek Libby and Larry Bresslour from Search for a Cure. For more information, contact Search for a Cure, 58 Burbank St., Boston, MA 02115; phone (617) 536-2474; fax (617) 266-0051; or e-mail hope@sfac.org.

Some HIV information sites to get you started

(Note: all of the following URLs begin with <http://www>.)

EASY-TO-MODERATE

Search for a Cure: sfac.org
AIDS Treatment Data Network: aidsnyc.org/network
The Body: thebody.com
AEGIS (AIDS Education Global Information Service): AEGIS.com
Project Inform: projinf.org
AIDS Clinical Trials Information Service: actis.org
San Francisco AIDS Foundation: sfaf.org
Community AIDS Treatment Information Exchange: catie.ca/catie.html
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National AIDS Clearinghouse: cdnac.org

MORE ADVANCED

HIV Insite: hivinsite.ucsf.edu/

American Medical Association: ama-assn.org/special/hiv/hivhome.htm
Medscape: medscape.com/
International Association of Physicians in AIDS Care: iapac.org/

CONFERENCE COVERAGE

Healthcare Communications Group: healthcg.com
National AIDS Treatment Advocacy Project: aidsnyc.org/natap

ACTIVIST SITES

ACT UP-New York: actupny.org
ACT UP-Golden Gate: actupgg.org