

HEALTH-SPECIAL

AIDS AND ADOLESCENTS

OVERVIEW

Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is now an epidemic in the United States, and all sectors of society are being affected. Many public health officials believe that teenagers, because of their experimentation with sex and drugs, are at increasingly high risk of becoming infected with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) that causes AIDS.

Current Status of AIDS in the United States

- As of December 14, 1987, 48,574 cases of AIDS in the United States had been reported to the Centers for Disease Control
- The number of AIDS cases involving heterosexuals is increasing 100% every six months.
- In New York City, AIDS is now the leading cause of death for women aged 25-34, and the fourth leading cause of death for women 15-24.
- An estimated 1-1.5 million Americans are currently infected with the virus that causes AIDS.
- It is estimated that by 1991:
 - Heterosexual transmission will account for more than 9% of new AIDS cases in the U.S.
 - The cumulative number of AIDS cases in the U.S. will total over 270,000.
 - The cumulative number of AIDS-related deaths in the U.S. will total over 179,000.

AIDS and HIV Infection Among Teenagers and Young Adults

- As of December 14, 1987, 200 cases of AIDS among teenagers aged 13-19 were reported to the Centers for Disease Control. Of these, 45% are White, 33.5% are Black, 19% are Hispanic, and 2.5% are of other races.
- Over one-fifth of people with AIDS are aged 20-29. Because of the long latency period for the virus, many of these people were probably infected as teenagers.
- Since October 1985, the United States Army has routinely tested applicants for HIV exposure. Of recruits aged 17-20, 0.6 per 1000 have been found to be

seropositive, which indicates exposure to HIV.

Of recruits aged 21-25, 2.5 per 1000 have been found to be seropositive.

TEENS AT RISK

Sexual Activity

- In the United States today, 11.5 million teenagers between 13 and 19 years of age have had sexual intercourse:
 - 5 million females — seven of every ten by age 20.
 - 6.5 million males — eight of every ten by age 20.
- One in six sexually active high school girls has had at least four different sexual partners.
- Four in ten females become pregnant before they turn twenty years old. More than one in every ten teenage women get pregnant each year.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

- Nearly one-half — 5 to 10 million — of all people treated for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are younger than 25.
- Ten to twenty-four-year-olds accounted for 62.5% of gonorrhea cases and 40% of syphilis cases in 1985.
- Of those teen women who use contraception, only 22% use the condom, while 78% use methods which are not as effective in preventing transmission of the virus that causes AIDS or other STDs.

- Each year, one in seven teenagers contracts a sexually transmitted disease.

Drug Use

- In a 1986 study conducted for the National Institute on Drug Abuse, 1.1% of U.S. high school seniors reported that they have used heroin.
- Nearly 30% of all students will drop out before high school graduation, and youth who have dropped out of high school have higher rates of I.V. drug use than those in school.
- A conservative estimate is that 200,000 American teens have used I.V. drugs.



Ms. Lauretta Slaughter - New Director - State of Oregon Minority AIDS Program

Naturopathic Medicine

By: Dr. Suzanne Scopes - -

Naturopathic medicine is a wholistic system of medicine that works with and enhances the innate power of the body to heal itself. The therapies used gently stimulate this healing process, so that the body can restore the healthy balance it naturally seeks. These natural therapies include nutrition, botanical medicines (herbs and herbal extracts), and homeopathic medicines which aim to treat the underlying cause of disease. Counseling on healthy living habits, including diet, exercise and stress management, is an integral part of learning how to stay well, the goal of preventive medicine.

Naturopathic physicians are trained

as general practitioners, and therefore treat most acute and chronic illnesses in persons of all age groups. They use modern diagnostic techniques including all laboratory services, and work with other health care practitioners in the best interest of the patient.

Naturopathic doctors are fully licensed as physicians, and many insurance policies will cover their services.

Dr. Suzanne Scopes is a naturopathic physician practicing in Southeast Portland. She specialized in nutrition, botanical and homeopathic medicine, with a focus on preventive medicine and women's health care.

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AIDS AND TEENAGERS

School health education programs must begin to educate the nation's adolescents about AIDS. Teenagers need this information because:

Thousands of teenagers are at risk of contacting the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) that causes AIDS because they engage in risky sexual behaviors, drug use, or both.

Teenagers are exposed to a barrage of misinformation about sexuality and AIDS, and education urgently is needed to counter misinformation and reduce panic surrounding the disease.

Teenagers are forming lifetime health habits, and need information to guide their development of adult health and sexual behaviors.

Teenagers are the major source of health-related information for their peers, and they also educate their siblings and parents.

Many young people already have been affected personally by AIDS. They may have parents, other family members, teacher, or friends who are, will or have been infected.

Young people are at an increasingly high risk of contracting HIV and becoming ill with AIDS. As of December 1987, only 200 U.S. teenagers had been diagnosed with AIDS. However, one-fifth of people with AIDS are in their 20s, many of whom no doubt were infected with the virus as teenagers.

Most cases in young adults were transmitted by sexual behaviors or intravenous (IV) drug use.

The incidence of HIV infection among the nation's teenagers is not known, however, existing seroprevalence data indicate cause for concern. Since October 1985, the U.S. Dept. of Defense routinely has tested civilian applicants for HIV as part of their preinduction medical evaluation. For every 1,000 recruits tested for exposure to HIV, 1.5 have been seropositive. In certain major cities, the incidence of infection among these young men and women is much higher.

In the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, it is 1 in 100; in New York City, it is 1 in 50. Seropositivity rates for young people are highest in the Middle Atlantic, Pacific, and South Atlantic states.

Many American teenagers engage in sexual activities that can transmit HIV. Most Americans begin having sexual intercourse as adolescents. Nationwide, one-half the boys and one-third of the girls in high schools have had intercourse. The average age of first intercourse throughout the country is around 16, and in some communities, it may be as low as 12. Many teenagers are not protecting themselves against pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases. One in 10 teenage girls become pregnant each

year. One in seven teens contracts a STD annually. Only one-third of sexually active teens use contraception regularly, and less than one-quarter of those who use contraception use condoms, the only existing protection against HIV infection during sexual intercourse.

Not all teenagers are heterosexual, and some teens experiment with same sex and opposite sex partners. The Kinsey Institute estimates four in 10 teen males have experimented with same sex partners. Though most of this activity probably does not involve behaviors that can transmit HIV, some of it undoubtedly does.

Sexual abuse is another potential source of transmission. It is difficult to estimate the number of teens who are sexually abused. One study found 3 percent of all teens currently are being abused, and more than one-half of all rape victims are adolescent females.

About 1 million teenagers run away each year and an estimated 187,500 runaways are involved in illegal activities such as drug use, prostitution, solicitation, and drug trafficking. An estimated 125,000 to 200,000 teenage men and women become involved in prostitution each year.

Drug use represents another potential source of HIV infection in the adolescent population. About 1 percent of high school seniors report they have used heroin, and use is higher among youth who have quit school. A conservative estimate suggests 200,000 teens have used IV drugs.

Teenagers also may be sharing needles for reasons other than IV drug use. Many teenage girls pierce each other's ears and the same needle may be used by several girls at a session. Tattooing, though significantly less frequent than ear piercing may involve the sharing of tattoo needles. Some teenage athletes may illegally obtain steroids for home injections.

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