

What is HIV & What is AIDS?

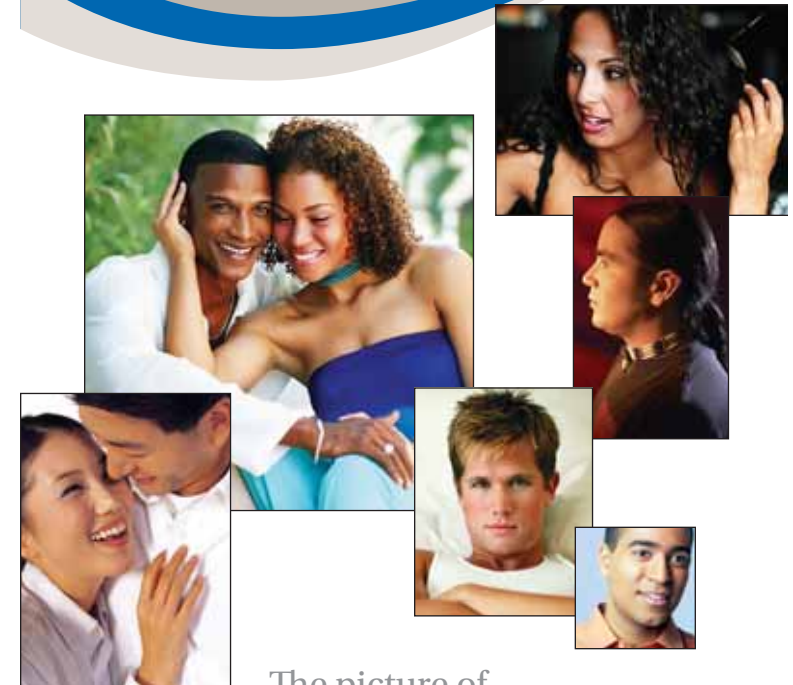
HIV: (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) destroys immune system cells, weakening the body's ability to protect itself from other diseases. HIV is transmitted when blood products or body fluids of a person who has the virus enter the blood stream of another person, often through unprotected sexual activity. HIV is not transmitted by most everyday, casual contacts with infected persons, such as using the same eating utensils, nor are people infected by insect bites.

AIDS: (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is the most advanced level of HIV infection. Generally, AIDS is diagnosed when the human immunodeficiency virus destroys so many immune system cells that the body cannot protect itself from serious diseases. AIDS is the total breakdown of the immune system and, although it can be slowed down, eventually AIDS causes death.

REFERENCES

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HIV & AIDS in America



The picture of HIV/AIDS in the United States is a snapshot of our society itself, in all its diversity



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We've come a long way... but there's a long way to go

The United States has made a lot of progress in slowing the growth of HIV and AIDS within its borders. New HIV infections—between 40,000 and 44,000 annually—are well below the 150,000 a year reported in the 1980s at the peak of the U.S. epidemic. And medical advances help those who contract HIV live much longer than those stricken during those early years. The onset of AIDS—the total breakdown of the body's capacity to protect itself from diseases—can be delayed for years and, in some cases, prevented.

Despite many medical advances, HIV and AIDS infections are on the rise again in the United States, increasing in large cities and small towns. Large metropolitan areas, where many AFT members live and work, are being hit hardest. In 2003, more than 435,000 AFT members lived in 106 metropolitan areas that had the most reported HIV and AIDS cases.

HIV cases remain high in men and are increasing rapidly in women, minority groups and young people from 14 to 24 years old. The number of infections caused by heterosexual contact also is rising.

Given current trends in the spread of the virus, many people may be at greater risk than they realize. If the spread of HIV and AIDS continues at the present rate, the potential impact on large numbers of AFT members, their communities and the institutions that serve them will be enormous.

Preventing HIV and AIDS: Awareness is the first step

AFT and its affiliates' work in Africa and the United States has shown that the first steps in prevention are to break the silence and reduce the shame often attached to HIV and AIDS. When individuals get information from those they trust, more of them respond to prevention messages. Experts report that getting accurate information to people is key to eliminating the shame that many associate with HIV and AIDS.

What each of us can do about HIV and AIDS

UNDERSTAND what HIV and AIDS are and the behaviors that put people at risk for contracting the virus. Get informed about how to protect against becoming infected.

LEARN about breakthroughs in HIV testing, prevention and treatment, including:

- progress on the use of microbicides, ointments that can prevent infection and advances in developing HIV vaccines.
- the benefits of getting tested for HIV. When people get tested, they not only find out their status but are more open to learning.
- the status of new HIV "rapid testing" techniques that give results in less than 30 minutes. Accurate results allow those who are HIV-positive to begin treatment and counseling immediately.
- the best medical treatments for HIV, called anti-retroviral drugs, which are being tested as preventive medications.

LEARN what HIV stigma is and oppose discrimination against anyone with HIV.

BECOME INVOLVED in awareness activities. Stand in solidarity with those who are affected and those who are fighting to eliminate HIV and AIDS.

For more information...

Contact us at the address below or visit the special page on our AFT Web site at:

www.aft.org/topics/aids-in-america

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