

HIV/AIDS IN DAILY LIFE

The treatment of AIDS remains extremely difficult but life goes on. This leaflet may help individuals and communities become better informed and, by understanding the disease, enable them to improve the life of sick people and their families.



WHAT IS HIV/AIDS?

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. It is caused by a virus called the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). HIV/AIDS is a serious illness which cannot be cured. So it should be avoided. Once infected with HIV, the virus progressively weakens the body until it cannot fight diseases any longer. HIV becomes AIDS when the immune system is seriously damaged. A person infected with HIV can appear or look healthy for many years before becoming ill.



HOW DO YOU CATCH HIV?

The most common ways to become infected with HIV are:

- having sexual intercourse with somebody who has hiv without using a condom
- through contact with infected blood in situations such as:
 - sharing syringes and needles with an hiv infected person
 - blood transfusions with infected blood
 - re-using sharp objects that have pierced the skin – at the hairdressers, circumcision or tattooing
- from mother to child - if a mother has hiv, there is a risk of transmitting the virus to her child during pregnancy, delivery and while breastfeeding.

Symptoms take time to appear so ask for advice at the health centre.

HOW CAN YOU AVOID HIV/AIDS?

- using a condom during sexual intercourse which protects you against HIV and other sexually transmitted infections
- abstinence or delaying your first sexual encounter
- being faithful to your partner or reducing your number of partners
- sterilizing all sharp objects used for circumcision, scarring, tattoos, piercing in boiling water for 20 minutes or using bleach or other strong detergents

HIV/AIDS CANNOT BE CAUGHT

- from mosquitoes and flies
- by touching tools, earth, seeds and so on
- from food bought at the market



YOU CAN LIVE WITHOUT RISK WITH A **PERSON INFECTED BY HIV/AIDS**

There is no risk in:

- sharing the same bed (if there is no unprotected sex)
- eating from the same dish
- using the same latrines
- shaking hands with a sick person, hugging or kissing on the cheek
- caring for a sick person
- transmission of HIV by coughs or sneezes
- carrying a sick child on one's back or in one's arms
- wearing clean clothes which have been worn by a person living with HIV/AIDS

REMEMBER

- people do not know they have HIV unless they have been tested and/or they have symptoms
- people don't realise they are taking part in activities which may result in them becoming infected
- it only takes one unsafe sexual act or risky behaviour to become infected with HIV
- not all people who look sick are infected with HIV

IF SOMEONE HAS HIV/AIDS, EATING WELL IS **VERY IMPORTANT. A SUFFICIENT AND BALANCED DIET HELPS PEOPLE:**

- to fight illnesses, protects the quality of life (for example by limiting diarrhoea) and strengthens morale
- to live a normal life as long as possible and continue working
- to take care of their family

Try and ensure that people produce and store the right kind and amounts of food or that they have enough money to purchase it. Try not to economise on food. Families should also eat well to stay healthy, to live an active life, and to assist those in need.

AVOID CATCHING OTHER ILLNESSES.

CLEANLINESS AND PERSONAL HYGIENE ARE VERY IMPORTANT:

- always use clean water
- everyone should wash their hands with soap and water regularly, especially before preparing meals, after going to the latrines, and before and after caring for a sick person
- keep the house clean
- clean all surfaces where food is prepared; keep food covered and protect it from dust and animals
- dump rubbish far from home, or in a pit and burn it regularly
- use latrines – keep them clean and covered.



P EOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS NEED TO TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES:

- ensure that individuals and families are in contact with associations of people living with HIV/AIDS or AIDS-care organisations
- advise individuals to visit the health centre immediately if they feel ill
- encourage them to rest more than usual
- encourage them to keep in good spirits and maintain a positive outlook on life
- support families to make plans for the future care of spouse and children

I F THERE ARE PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS IN THE COMMUNITY:

- invite them regularly to have a meal with your family
- encourage other members of the community to visit people who are sick
- assist their households with crucial farming operations such as planting and harvesting

Q UESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION IN THE COMMUNITY

- What kind of assistance is available locally for people living with HIV and AIDS? Are there any associations for people living with HIV/AIDS? Are voluntary counselling and testing services (VCT) available locally?
- What can the community do to help households who are caring for someone who is chronically ill?
- How can the community assist in planning for the future care of widows and orphans?
- How can the community increase awareness among the youth about the importance of safe sex?
- How can the community empower women and young girls to be able to say no to sex or be able to negotiate for condom use?

SEE OTHER LEAFLETS IN THIS SERIES:

- AIDS and your food
- The role of field workers in supporting AIDS-affected families