AIDS

Category : Social Issues

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A.I.D.S.

(Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome)

Â AIDS is a serious disease, which was discovered in 1981 in the U.S. among homosexual men.Â The word AIDS is an acronym for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.Â It is an acquired infection as opposed to a genetic immune deficiency ffb or autoimmune.Â A virus called human immuno-deficiency virus (HIV) causes it.Â Once the virus is transmitted, it attacks the body's immune system, which depends on the white blood cells.Â Once the immune system is weakened, the body becomes susceptible to various opportunistic infections, especially of the pulmonary and digestive systems, as well as neuralgic lesions and some malignancies. Â **Means of Transmission and Infection:** Transmission happens from an infected to non-infected person by means of transmission of bodily substances containing the virus. Mainly, this happens through blood, plasma, semen, vaginal secretions, and to a lesser degree through saliva and tears.Â It is characterized by being a weak virus, which can not resist external factors, and can not penetrate intact human skin.Â Mosquitoes or other insects do not carry it. Â **Transmission and infection take place through one of the following ways:** 1. Contact with blood or bodily fluids from an infected person to a non-infected person as in cases of blood transfusion, needle sticks, and using contaminated needles.Â Also, if a non-infected person has cuts or abrasions in the skin and comes in contact with infected blood or bodily fluids from an infected person, then infection may result.Â However, if the non-infected person's skin is intact, he can not contract the virus by casual contact with an infected person. 2. During sexual intercourse if one of the partners is infected.Â The virus can be present in semen or vaginal secretions. 3.Â Perinatally, i.e. from mother to fetus via the placenta.Â It is also present in breast milk.Â Â Because the virus is too weak to resist external factors, it can not be transmitted by casual contact of an infected person's belongings and is not air-borne, i.e. not by being present in the same room and breathing the same air.

High Risk Groups: High-risk groups have been identified through clinical studies.Â They include homosexual and bisexual men, IV drug users who share needles, heterosexual individuals with multiple partners, prostitutes, recipients of transfused blood or blood components, and babies born to infected mothers, as well as hemophiliacs.Â 90% of patients are between the age of 20-49 and 94% are among those of the high-risk group. Â **Symptoms of the Disease:** Symptoms may vary from one person to another depending on the reaction of the immune system.Â However, we can divide those infected into two groups: 1. Those who are carriers of the virus, yet have no clinical symptoms.Â Incubation period maybe up to two years with some individuals, but almost all HIV infected persons will eventually develop AIDS.Â Individuals, who are carriers of the virus and do not

display any signs or symptoms of the disease, can still infect others. 2. Those who are infected and manifest symptoms of the disease.Â These symptoms may range from fever, malaise, and enlargement of the lymph nodes to the more severe where there are opportunistic infections affecting the lungs, intestines, brain, etc.Â There are generalized lymph node enlargement, weight loss, intermittent fever, fatigue, chronic diarrhea, anemia, oral thrush (a hairy tongue), severe decrease in the white blood cell count, seizures, memory loss, etc. This is a very serious disease and will eventually lead to death.Â In the meantime, the patient suffers physical pain caused by the infections and tumors, which develop. Â **Diagnosis:** The most specific diagnosis of HIV infection is by the isolation of HIV or the antigen of the virus in the blood. The test for isolation of the virus is an expensive, cumbersome, and not widely available procedure.Â The test, which is more widely available and inexpensive, is the one detecting antibodies to HIV revealed by a blood test.Â It is called an ELISA testing, and it is highly sensitive and specific even with individuals who show no symptoms of the disease. There are no complete recoveries from AIDS.Â It is a very serious disease, which will lead to death in the end.Â Although patients may survive for years, their quality of life is markedly compromised.Â They have to be on a wide variety of medications, which have their own side effects.Â Many spend their remaining lifetime hospitalized. Â **The Moral Aspects of the Disease:** AIDS is not just a medical problem; it is a social problem, which has deep moral implications.Â The major means of spreading the disease and infection is a deviant lifestyle.Â The great majority are homosexual and bisexual men, promiscuous heterosexuals, and IV drug users.Â It is true that some of those infected are innocent victims, e.g. babies born to infected mothers, recipients of blood transfusions in which the blood is tainted, and health care professionals who have accidental needle sticks.Â However, the scrutiny in screening the blood and plasma donors has tremendously diminished and almost eliminated contracting the disease through blood transfusions. Also, health care workers routinely use universal precautions and barriers to prevent against accidental needle sticks. The real challenge in facing the problem of AIDS is dealing with the widespread of deviant lifestyles so prevalent in many societies.Â There is a false concept about sexual freedom, including extra-marital sexual relationships resulting in the dissolution of the family unit and affecting the husband, wife, and children.Â There is widespread use of drugs including illicit drugs and intravenous shooting of drugs, and the distorted understand of sex and sexual pleasure.Â All of this makes AIDS a social problem and not merely a problem of the Health Department.Â This gives the Church a special and crucial role in confronting this modern age plague, which threatens humanity. As a Church, we need to address the problems, implications, and complications of the disease: how it is spread, its seriousness and fatality, as well as how to prevent it.Â Forefront in its prevention is spreading the religious morals and principles, which call for a life of purity, chastity, holiness, and rejection of all deviant lifestyles.Â For the unmarried, chastity through abstinence must be emphasized and encouraged.Â It is the Christian morals and principles of chastity, purity, and holiness, which constitute the most important factors in fighting the spread AIDS and most importantly in preventing it.