

# **AIDS EDUCATION FOR COLLEGES**

## **STUDENTS' HANDBOOK**

Produced in cooperation with the Malawi Ministry of Health, AIDS Secretariat, Health Education Unit, Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Community Services, UNICEF, WHO, Malawi Institute of Education and USAID/AIDSCOM.

1992 Edition

**PRELIMINARY  
TRAINING COPY**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....3  
TOPIC ONE ---- WHAT IS AIDS?.....4  
TOPIC TWO ---- SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS ASSOCIATED WITH AIDS.....6  
TOPIC THREE -- HIV TRANSMISSION.....8  
TOPIC FOUR --- PREVENTION OF AIDS.....11  
TOPIC FIVE --- CARING FOR HIV/AIDS INFECTED PERSONS.....13  
TOPIC SIX ---- SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF AIDS.....15  
GLOSSARY.....18

## INTRODUCTION

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, or AIDS, is a new global problem. Every nation is threatened by it and as many as 5 to 10 million people may already be infected with the AIDS virus worldwide.

AIDS kills by damaging the body's defenses. As of now there is no know cure.

The only effective weapon against the spread of AIDS at the moment is public education. Everyone must know about AIDS and how to take practical steps to avoid it.

In the light of this, students, who constitute one of the important components of our society, can play a major role in educating other members of the community about the danger of AIDS.

And that is the purpose of this handbook.

## TOPIC ONE

### WHAT IS AIDS?

AIDS is a disease that is caused by a virus known as HIV. This virus destroys the defenses of the human body, called the *immune system*. This makes a person susceptible to other infections. AIDS is an epidemic which has no known cure and no vaccine. It is characterized by life threatening infections such as pneumonia and cancers.

AIDS is an abbreviation for

A = acquired

I = immuno

D = deficiency

S = syndrome

"Acquired" means that the condition is not genetically inherited. "Immunodeficiency" means a failure of the body's defenses, the immune system. "Syndrome" is a group of symptoms which develop after an infection takes place.

HIV is an abbreviation for

H = human

I = immunodeficiency

V = virus

HIV, like all other viruses, reproduces in living cells of a host. The HIV attacks the white blood cells called *lymphocytes*, which are responsible for the body's defence system. When the HIV enters the blood stream it penetrates the lymphocytes. There are two possible outcomes when this happens:

1. The HIV may remain dormant in the lymphocyte and the infected cell continues to function normally. In this case the infection persists without causing any symptoms. This condition is called *asymptomatic*. During this stage, however, the HIV can be transmitted to other people who may then become infected.

2. Or, the HIV may become active and multiply itself, killing the infected lymphocytes. The dead lymphocytes burst, releasing more HIV into the blood stream which, in turn, attack other lymphocytes. When a large number of lymphocytes have been destroyed by the virus, the body's immune system becomes progressively weaker. It is at this point that AIDS symptoms begin to appear.

The processes described above explain why some infected people remain asymptomatic for longer periods than others. It is essential to remember, however, that asymptomatic persons can infect others with HIV.

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you think can be done about a disease which has no cure?
2. How can you tell if somebody has AIDS?
3. What is the function of lymphocytes in the human body?
4. What is the relationship between HIV and AIDS?
5. Who can get AIDS?

## TOPIC TWO

### SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS ASSOCIATED WITH AIDS

The following are some of the signs and symptoms displayed by people with AIDS:

- o Persistent fever.
- o Prolonged diarrhoea leading to loss of weight.
- o Oral thrush (mouth sores).
- o Persistent skin infection.
- o Shingles.
- o Enlargement of the lymph glands.
- o Persistent fatigue or tiredness.
- o Loss of appetite.
- o Chronic cough.

These signs and symptoms may indicate AIDS, which is the terminal stage of the HIV infection. Many other diseases also have some of these same signs and symptoms. However, the continuation of these conditions for more than two weeks may indicate AIDS infection. It is important to note that it is difficult to confirm that a person has AIDS by merely looking at these signs and symptoms. It is only through blood testing that a reliable diagnosis can be made.

The time interval between acquiring the HIV infection and showing signs and symptoms, called the *incubation period*, ranges from a few months to several years or longer. However, it is important to remember that an infected person can transmit the HIV even though he or she shows no signs or symptoms.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are some of the signs and symptoms of AIDS?
2. What are some other diseases which may have some of these same signs and symptoms?
3. What is meant by incubation period?

## TOPIC THREE

### HIV TRANSMISSION

There are three documented ways by which the HIV can be transmitted from one person to another: sexual intercourse, blood to blood transmission and mother to child transmission.

1. Sexual Intercourse -- During sexual intercourse semen, vaginal fluid and occasionally the blood of an infected person passes into the body of another person. In this way the HIV from the infected individual can enter the blood stream of the other person. This can happen from man to man, from man to woman and woman to man. The more sex partners you have, the greater the risk that you will be infected with HIV. The HIV can be transmitted through:
  - o Anal intercourse -- penis to anus
  - o Vaginal intercourse -- penis to vagina
  - o Oral intercourse -- mouth to penis or mouth to vagina
2. Blood to Blood Transmission -- There are several ways in which the HIV can be transmitted through blood exchange:
  - o Blood and blood product transfusion -- this happens when an uninfected person receives blood or blood products from a person infected with the HIV.
  - o Sharing unsterilized needles and syringes -- A needle or syringe can pick up small amounts of blood from the person being injected. If that person's blood contains the HIV, and if the same needle or syringe is used for injecting another person without being sterilized, the HIV can be transmitted from one to the other.

- o Sharing unsterilized instruments for tattooing, scarification and circumcision -- Cutting and skin piercing instruments , if used on a HIV infected person, can become contaminated. Then, if the same contaminated instrument is used on another person without being properly sterilized, the HIV can be passed into the second person's blood.
3. Mother to Child Transmission -- It is possible for an infected pregnant woman to transmit the virus to the fetus before or during childbirth. There is a very low risk that the HIV could be passed on to the baby by breast feeding.

The HIV cannot be transmitted from an infected person to others by:

- o Being near to or touching those who have AIDS.
- o Hugging, kissing, shaking hands.
- o Coughing or sneezing.
- o Sharing food or even eating together from the same plate.
- o Animal bites and insect bites, such as mosquito, tsetse-fly and bed bug.
- o Having a haircut where infected persons also have their hair cut.
- o Dancing and talking at a party.
- o Being in a classroom and school yard with an infected person.
- o Sharing towels, blankets and clothes used by infected persons.
- o Using toilet seats, bus seats or chairs used by infected persons.
- o Coming into contact with tears and sweat of an infected person.
- o Donating blood.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do the following terms mean?
  - o Transmission
  - o Sterilization
  - o Donation of blood
  - o Tattooing
  - o Circumcision
  - o Scarification
2. What are the three documented ways by which the HIV can be transmitted from one person to another? Explain each of them.
3. What are some ways that the HIV cannot be spread?
4. What behavior increases your risk of getting AIDS?

## TOPIC FOUR

### PREVENTION OF AIDS

AIDS has no known cure or vaccine. It is therefore very important to know the preventive measures against this disease. Some of the preventive measures are:

1. Abstinence -- One of the most effective ways of preventing AIDS is to abstain from high risk sexual practices, whether you are married or single. But since AIDS can also be contracted through transfusion of infected blood and the use of unsterilized instruments, people must make sure that they receive only screened blood and injections only from sterilized needles.
2. Faithfulness -- People who are married should be faithful to their life partners. Failure to maintain this bond by seeking other sexual partners increases the risk of contracting AIDS.
3. Proper Use of Condoms -- Proper use of condoms may prevent one from contracting the HIV. However, condoms are not 100 percent safe because they may burst, tear or come off if not used properly.
4. Blood Donation -- People who know they are HIV positive must not donate blood, plasma, sperm, organs or any other body tissue. It is important that all blood donations be screened before transfusion to protect the blood supply.
5. Mother to Child Transmission -- Women who know that they have the HIV should avoid becoming pregnant. However, if an infected mother has a baby she should continue to breastfeed the child because of the natural immunity that is found in the mother's milk.
6. Skin Cutting and Piercing Instruments -- Instruments such as razor blades, injection needles, surgical tools and instruments used for circumcision, tattooing and scarifying that could become contaminated with blood must not be shared unless they are properly sterilized.

7. Substances Which Influence Judgement -- The excessive consumption of alcohol and other drugs such as Indian hemp (chamba) should be avoided because they can impair judgement and could lead to high risk sexual behavior.

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What to the following terms mean?
  - o Abstention
  - o Faithfulness
  - o HIV positive
2. Why should the use of alcohol and drugs be avoided?
3. What can be done to avoid contracting AIDS from contaminated skin cutting instruments?

## TOPIC FIVE

### CARING FOR HIV/AIDS INFECTED PERSONS

AIDS patients need as much help, care, love and support as any other patients. As someone caring for an AIDS patient, getting infected yourself should not be the primary concern if normal precautions are taken.

In comparison to other *communicable diseases*, AIDS is much less contagious than the common cold and measles. Therefore, no one should be afraid of getting AIDS by casual contact. For example, people can work with and care for AIDS patients, attend school and public events and eat at restaurants with AIDS patients without the fear of becoming infected with the HIV.

AIDS patients, like any other patient, will respond best if the person caring for them maintains a positive, optimistic attitude. The care giver should also:

- o Live and work with the patient as normally as possible.
- o Touch the patient as you normally would if he or she was well.
- o Offer to help the patient with chores and business affairs.
- o Be sensitive to the patient's feelings, i.e., discuss the illness only with the patient's consent.
- o Provide moral and spiritual support. Encourage the patient to maintain a positive attitude toward life and to participate in family affairs to the extent possible.
- o Observe the usual hygienic precaution when caring for AIDS patients, such as keeping any wounds or cuts on the body covered and not sharing items which may be contaminated.
- o Help patients keep their bodies, clothing and bedding clean.

- o Encourage the patient to get enough rest.
- o See that the patient drinks extra fluids.
- o Give patients foods that they are able to eat.

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are some other communicable diseases in addition to AIDS?
2. Are AIDS patients basically different than other patients? Why or why not?
3. What are some ways you can help someone with AIDS?
4. What are some of the advantages and problems of caring for an AIDS patient at home?

## TÓPIC SIX

### SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF AIDS

It must be recognized that in the Malawian context an individual's life is not his or hers alone, but also belongs to other members of the family, community and nation. When a person gets AIDS, many others are affected.

What AIDS can do --

My father died of AIDS.

My mother died of AIDS.

My brother died of AIDS.

My sister died of AIDS.

My son died of AIDS.

My daughter died of AIDS.

My grandchild died of AIDS.

My grandparents died of AIDS.

My uncle died of AIDS.

My aunt died of AIDS.

My niece died of AIDS.

My nephew died of AIDS.

My cousin died of AIDS.

My friend died of AIDS.

My boss died of AIDS.

My teacher died of AIDS.

My pastor died of AIDS.

My church member died of AIDS.

AIDS is a killer disease which continues to threaten the lives of many people around the world. The disease affects people of all walks of life and varied socio-economic status. It can attack and kill anyone, no matter who they may be.

Many young people are dying of AIDS. The loss of these young, productive people has an adverse impact on the socio-economic development of the country.

As of 1990, 77 percent of all diagnosed AIDS cases in Malawi fall in the range of 20 to 50 years of age. These are people who contribute significantly to the development of the country on the individual level, the family level, the community level and the national level. Among this age group are people who are highly skilled and educated in various occupations and professions. These include teachers, doctors, lawyers, pilots, engineers, agriculturists and administrators. If large numbers of these people die, the economy of the country could collapse.

As the number of deaths from AIDS increases, so do the number of orphans, widows and widowers. The result is social upheaval and disruption as well as increased costs to provide for their care.

It must also be remembered that the treatment and care of AIDS patients is expensive and can greatly increase the financial burden of families and the country. Medical services required for the care of AIDS patients limit the amount of resources available to treat others.

It is important that everyone take the AIDS epidemic seriously. While at this point in time the number of people dying from AIDS is not as great as the number dying from other major diseases like malaria and tuberculosis, more and more people are being infected with HIV everyday. Those infected will develop AIDS and eventually die. But the spread of AIDS can be prevented, and together we can save many lives, perhaps the lives of those close to us.

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the significance of the fact that AIDS mostly affects persons between the ages of 20 and 50 years?

2. Why should we be so concerned about AIDS when it currently kills fewer people than some other diseases?
3. What problems will the medical services face as the number of AIDS patients increases?

## GLOSSARY

Asymptomatic -- Showing no symptoms of a disease.

Communicable Diseases -- Diseases which spread from person to person.

Immune System -- The body's system for defending itself against viruses, bacteria and other foreign substances which enter the body.

Incubation Period -- The time period between infection and the first appearance of symptoms of a disease.

Lymphocytes -- White blood cells which help the body fight off infection.