Myths and Facts about HIV/AIDS

MYTH: HIV is spread by mosquitoes.
FACT: According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Human Immunodeficiency Virus cannot be transmitted by mosquitoes or other blood-sucking insects. (http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/qa/qa32.htm)

MYTH: HIV/AIDS is a gay man's disease.
FACT: HIV/AIDS knows no boundaries. Transmission can occur through heterosexual and homosexual sexual contact, as well as through blood-to-blood contact, and mother-to-child transmission. According to MedicineNet.com, the most common form of HIV transmission worldwide is through heterosexual sex.

MYTH: AIDS is a punishment from God.
FACT: AIDS is a syndrome caused by a virus. HIV is a virus, as are the common cold and the flu. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and all other public health organizations stress that the AIDS epidemic is biological in nature and should be viewed as a public health concern, not a reason for judgment

MYTH: Condoms are not effective at preventing HIV transmission.
FACT: When used correctly, latex and polyurethane condoms are highly effective in preventing the transmission of HIV, according to the Foundation for AIDS Research. (amfar.org). The lack of comprehensive AIDS education leads to incorrect condom usage, which greatly reduces their efficacy. Sheepskin condoms are not effective at preventing HIV transmission, as particles the size of HIV can penetrate this barrier.

MYTH: Teaching comprehensive AIDS education promotes promiscuity.
FACT: Evidence shows that comprehensive sex education programs that provide information about both abstinence and contraception can help delay the onset of sexual activity among teenagers, reduce their number of sexual partners, and increase contraceptive use when they become sexually active. These findings were underscored in "Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior," issued by former Surgeon General David Satcher in June 2001.

MYTH: AIDS started from sexual intercourse with monkeys.
FACT: HIV is a mutated form of SIV, simian immunodeficiency virus. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, scientists' best explanation is that the virus was able to cross species due to repeated contact of hunters with infected blood from chimpanzees. The origin of HIV is far less important than our response to the current global epidemic.

MYTH: Packaged condoms, medications, and other inanimate objects can contain HIV.
FACT: HIV can only live in human blood, semen, vaginal fluid, and breast milk, and dies once these fluids have dried. HIV can only be transmitted via direct contact with one of these fluids. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, HIV cannot live outside of the body (except in carefully controlled laboratory settings) making HIV transmission from packaged condoms or other items impossible.

MYTH: HIV can be spread from hugging, kissing, sharing food, and sitting on toilet seats.
FACT: HIV cannot be spread by saliva*, mucous, or sweat, so casual contact with HIV-positive persons does not put one at risk for transmission. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, HIV can only be spread by direct contact with infected blood, semen, vaginal fluid, or breast milk.

MYTH: Having sex with virgin(s) cures HIV/AIDS.
FACT: This tragic myth has led to countless rapes. The use of antiretroviral drug therapy is recommended for persons living with HIV/AIDS, as this treatment can slow the progression of HIV/AIDS and reduce the level of the virus in a person's bloodstream, sometimes to an undetectable level. According to the AIDS Education and Training Centers, having an undetectable viral load is the main goal of anti-retroviral therapy.

MYTH: If a man is HIV-positive, all of his children will be HIV-positive.
FACT: Fathers cannot directly transmit HIV to their children. Seminal fluid and pre-ejaculate contain HIV, but HIV is not present in sperm, which fertilizes the egg. However, since pregnancy results from unprotected sexual contact, it is possible that the mother was infected with HIV at the time of conception and may then pass the virus on to her child. This is described in detail in the transmission section. According to About.com, there are now medical facilities providing a procedure called "sperm washing" in which the sperm of an HIV-positive man is separated from the infectious seminal fluid so that the sperm may be artificially implanted in his partner to facilitate a pregnancy with a significantly reduced likelihood of HIV transmission to both the woman and the infant.

MYTH: People over 65 sixty-five don't need to worry about HIV.
FACT: Many senior citizens who have been in monogamous relationships for decades are finding themselves single and dating again due to the death of a spouse or divorce. Senior citizen couples may be tempted to think that because they no longer have to worry about pregnancy and contraceptives they should not be concerned. The fact is, that senior citizens are sexually active, and HIV infection rates are on the rise among the elderly in the U.S. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 19 percent of all individuals in the U.S. who are living with HIV are over 50 fifty years of age. This is further complicated by often already weakened immune systems, and physicians who may not be in the habit of asking older patients about their sexual activity, leading to a delayed diagnosis.

MYTH: People who are married are less likely to acquire the HIV virus.
FACT: According to John Hopkins School of Public Health, marriage is the number one risk factor for HIV infection among Thai women. This is due to husbands having extramarital affairs and infecting their wives. While the John Hopkins study is specific to Thailand, marriage has been shown to be a risk factor for HIV infection in many parts of the world.
(http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/press/1996/MARCH/199609.HTM)

MYTH: HIV is not spread through oral sex.
FACT: According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, HIV transmission is possible through oral sex, although it is less risky than vaginal or anal sex. (http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/qa/qa19.htm)

*Fact 8: In very rare cases, if one person has gum disease and gets blood, semen or vaginal secretions in their mouth, the saliva can transmit HIV.