

sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

factoid

HIV/AIDS is the fifth leading cause of death for American women and men between 25 and 44 years of age. It is believed that at least 40,000 Americans become infected each year.

(Planned Parenthood website – Sexually Transmitted Infections: The Facts)

Q. How likely is it that a college student could contract HIV? Is it true that it's really hard to get HIV, but the community is scared into thinking they can get it easily so that they'll practice safer sex?

A. Although HIV/AIDS is not the most prevalent of all sexually transmitted infections among college students, it is still the most dangerous in that there is no cure or vaccine for it. While prescription drugs may help people with AIDS live longer, the treatment regimens are intensive, expensive and often have debilitating side effects; and, the disease can ultimately be fatal.

The following statistics will give you an idea of the risks for contracting HIV/AIDS (all data derived from the Centers for Disease Control [CDC]):

- From 1981 through 2003, a total of 902,223 cases of AIDS were reported to the CDC; 81% of these cases were males, 19% were females.
- Most of the AIDS cases were diagnosed when the men and women were 25-44 years of age. [Note: it may take up to 10 years for HIV infection to progress to AIDS.]
- Attributing causes for HIV/AIDS transmission in 2003 – 42% male-to-male sexual contact, 31% heterosexual contact, 22% injection drug use.
- **Males only:** Attributing causes for HIV/AIDS transmission in 2003 – 57% male-to-male sexual contact, 20% injection drug use, 16% heterosexual contact, 6% male-to-male sexual contact and injection drug use.
- **Females only:** Attributing causes for HIV/AIDS transmission in 2003 – 71% heterosexual contact, 27% injection drug use.

HIV is spread through blood, semen, vaginal fluids and breast milk. Anal and vaginal intercourse, and sharing contaminated needles for injection drug use are common ways in which one person can infect another with HIV. Oral sex can also transmit HIV, but these occurrences are less common.

If you plan to have sex, use condoms consistently and correctly to reduce your risk of HIV infection, and other sexually transmitted diseases – chlamydia, herpes and genital warts – that are more common among college students.

Have a question? Send it to sextalk@email.arizona.edu

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