

Aids college essay



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AIDS

“ Somewhere among the million children who go to New York’s publicly financed schools is a seven-year-old child suffering from AIDS. A special health and education panel had decided, on the strength of the guidelines issued by the federal Centers for Disease Control, that the child would be no danger to his classmates. Yet, when the school year started on September 9th, several thousand parents in two school districts in the borough of Queens kept their children at home. Fear of plague can be as pernicious, and contagious, as the plague itself(Fear of dying 1).”

This article was written in 1985. Since then much has been found out about AIDS. Not enough for a cure though. There probably will be no cure found in the near future because the technology needed is not available.

AIDS cases were first identified in 1981, in the United States. Researchers have traced cases back to 1959. There are millions of diagnosed cases worldwide, but there is no cure(Drotman 163).

There are about a million people in the United States who are currently

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infected with HIV(HIV/AIDS 1). It infects the population heavily in some areas of the country and very lightly in other areas. No race, sex, social class, or age is immune(AIDS Understanding 10). AIDS has killed more americans

than the Vietnam War, which killed 58, 000(AIDS Understanding 10).

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency

Syndrome. Acquired means that it is not hereditary or introduced by medication.

Immune indicates that it is related to the body's system that fights off disease. Deficiency represents the lack of certain kinds of cells that are normally found in the body. Syndrome is a group of symptoms and signs of disordered function that signal the diagnoses(Hyde 1). You don't catch AIDS, you catch HIV. HIV is the virus that leads to AIDS. HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency virus. HIV severely damages a person's disease fighting

immune system. There are two viruses that cause AIDS. They belong to a group called retroviruses. The first virus is HIV-1. It was isolated by researchers in France in 1983, and in the U. S. in 1984. In 1985, the second

one was identified by scientists in France. It is closely related to HIV-1.

It is called HIV-2. HIV-2 mainly occurs in Africa but HIV-1 occurs throughout the world(Drotman 163).

There are three stages of the infection.

The first stage is acute retroviral syndrome and asymptomatic period. This is the flulike or mononucleosislike illness that most people get within 6-12 weeks after becoming infected. It usually goes away without treatment.

From this point on the person's blood tests positively for HIV. The second stage is symptomatic HIV infection. This is when the infected person's symptoms show up. It can last anywhere from a few months to many years.

The third and final stage is AIDS. This is when the immune system is severally

damaged and the opportunistic diseases set in. The progressive breakdown of the immune system leads to death, usually within a few years.

HIV causes a severe “wasting syndrome.”

A general decline in the health and in some cases, death. The virus infects the brain and the nervous system. It may cause dementia, a condition of sensory, thinking, or memory disorder. Infection of the brain may cause

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movement or coordination problems(Drotman 164).

HIV can be present in the body for two

to twelve years without any outward sign of illness. It can be transmitted

to another person even if no symptoms are present(Drotman 164). When HIV

picks up speed, a variety of symptoms are possible. The symptoms include

unexplained fever, fatigue, diarrhea, weight loss, enlarged lymph glands,

loss of appetite, yeast infections of the mouth and vagina, night sweats

lasting longer than several weeks, breathing difficulties, a dry cough,

sore throat caused by swollen glands, chills, and shaking(Quackenbush 23).

Pink or purple, flat or raised blotches or bumps occurring under the skin,

inside the mouth, nose, eyelids or rectum are also symptoms. They resemble

bruises, but don't disappear. They are usually harder than the skin around

them. White spots or unusual blemishes in the mouth is another

symptom(Quackenbush

24).

There are two illnesses that commonly affect

AIDS patients. One is a type of pneumonia called pneumocystis carinii.

The other one is a type of cancer called kaposi's sarcoma, which attacks

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the skin(What are HIV/AIDS 1). Pneumocystis carinii is a yeast infection in the esophagus. It causes severe pain when swallowing which results in weight loss and dehydration. It is the leading cause of death among AIDS patients. Kaposi's sarcoma are tumors that look like bruises, but grow.

These two diseases plus many other are called opportunistic diseases. For decades cases declined in the U. S. until the mid-1980's. Since the mid-80's cases are growing especially in HIV infected people. People with AIDS eventually

contract atleast one of the opportunistic diseases. These are the diseases that AIDS patients usually die from(Drotman 164).

HIV is transmitted three ways. One way

is through unprotected vaginal, anal, or oral sex. The most risky is anal sex because the anus doesn't stretch. Therefore, it is easier for the skin to tear and bleed. This makes it easier for the infection to get into the bloodstream. It can get soaked up by the mucous membranes that line the vagina, rectum, hole in the tip of the penis, mouth, and the throat(Johnson 17).

The second way is through direct contact

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with infected blood. There are a couple ways of getting it through direct contact with infected blood. One way is by sharing a hypodermic needle with someone who is infected. A tiny drop of infected blood stays inside the needle and syringe. So if a person uses it he or she is actually shooting the infected blood directly into his or her bloodstream. That little droplet of infected blood is enough to give you HIV. Sharing needles for skin-popping can spread HIV in the same way. This way a person is more likely to get infections such as abscesses. A person can also get HIV from sharing other drug “works” with someone who is infected. Containers or cookers such as spoons or bottle caps, crackpipes, cotton, or water for dissolving drugs or rinsing syringes are some of the “works.” It doesn’t matter what a person is shooting in the needle-heroin, cocaine, speed, steroids, insulin, or any other drug. If a person shares a needle or “works” with someone who has HIV, he or she could get infected too(Johnson 20). Another way is through

a blood transfusion. Chances of getting HIV through a blood transfusion in the U. S. are now very low, but still possible. Testing began in 1985, of all blood and plasma that is donated. The tests that doctors use are

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over 99% accurate. Blood is destroyed if signs of the virus show up in the donated blood. Therefore, it is almost impossible to get infected through a blood transfusion. Before 1985, some people became infected through infected

blood and certain blood products. In the U. S. every piece of equipment used to draw blood is brand new. It is only used once and then it is destroyed.

Therefore it is impossible for a donor to get HIV from giving plasma or blood(HIV/AIDS 2).

The third way of getting HIV is an infected woman transmitting it to her fetus or baby. A pregnant woman with HIV can pass the virus to her child before or after birth. The way this happens is the fetus gets nourishment from its mother through the placenta and the umbilical cord. That is one of the ways. The other way is through breast feeding(Johnson 24).

The only way to stem the spread of infection remains the public health approach, educating people on how to avoid infection

or educating the infected people on how to avoid infecting someone else.

There are many ways to prevent the transmission and spread of AIDS. A person

has to be aware, because most people who are infected don't know they are(Nichols

3). One way to prevent infection is to not engage in the act of sexual intercourse with anyone who is or might be infected. If someone is going to , then he or she should atleast use a latex condom. It is medically proven that latex condoms can help to prevent HIV and other sexually transmitted

diseases. HIV can not pass through the intact rubber film. It is almost impossible to catch the virus if the condom is used properly. This means using a good quality condom, one with the kite mark, with a spermicide.

The condom itself can kill the virus(HIV/AIDS 2). Condoms don't completely eliminate the risk of being infected because they can tear, break, or slip off. Birth control pills and diaphragms will not protect a person or his or her partner from getting HIV either(HIV/AIDS 4). Drug users should seek professional help to stop doing drugs. They should never share hypodermic

needles, syringes, or other injection equipment. Azidothymidine, commonly known as AZT, may reduce the risk of an infected woman transmitting it to her fetus or baby. Also, infected women should not breast feed their infants, since HIV can be present in the breast milk of an infected woman(Drotman 164).

There are a number of things that a person can not get HIV from, that people are skeptical about. A person can not get AIDS from handshakes, hugs, coughs, sneezes, sweat, tears, mosquitoes, or other insects, pets, eating food prepared by someone else, or just being around an infected person. A person can't get it from sharing a cigarette, cigar, or pipe, drinking from the same fountain, or from someone spitting on him or her. A person also can't get it from using the same swimming pools, toilet seats, phones, computers, straws, spoons, or cups. Although the virus has been found in saliva, medical opinion states there is no evidence of contamination through " wet kissing"(What are HIV/AIDS 1). HIV is not spread through the air or water, unlike many other viruses(HIV/AIDS 2). No one has ever caught AIDS by going to a physician or an eye doctor

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who has treated AIDS patients. No one has ever caught AIDS by eating in a restaurant where AIDS patients have been, nor by sharing a dwelling in which AIDS victims live. No one has caught AIDS by working, studying, or playing with an AIDS patient, unless bodily fluids were exchanged. No one has ever gotten AIDS from an insect bite, even where there are many people with AIDS and even where there are many people with dozens of mosquito bites(AIDS, Understanding 2).

HIV is very fragile. It doesn't live long

or well outside the human body. It is easily killed with a 1: 10 solution of bleach and water. It can be washed from skin with regular soaps. HIV

will not survive outside the human body for more than a few hours at the most(Quackenbush 23).

If a person thinks he or she might have

HIV, he or she can get tested. HIV tests determine the presence of antibodies

to the AIDS virus. Antibodies are proteins produced by certain white blood cells to react with specific viruses, bacteria, or foreign substances that

go into the body. The presence of antibodies to HIV indicates infection

with the virus. The tests that detect the presence of HIV-1 became widely available in 1985. The tests that detect HIV-2 became widely available in 1992. All infected patients should get blood tests done periodically.

They should also have their health monitored by a physician(Drotman 164).

There is no cure for HIV or AIDS, but treatments

have been developed. The treatments help most people live longer. The infected

people have to take medications to help them keep healthy and possibly

postpone the development of AIDS(Johnson 33). Most of the medication has

difficult side effects. Even with all of this, about 18 months after a

person has been diagnosed with AIDS, he or she usually get quite sick and

require hospital care(AIDS, Understanding 4).

Scientists are not sure how, when, or where

the AIDS virus originated. Researchers have shown that HIV-1 and HIV-2

are more closely related to simian immunodeficiency viruses than to each

other. Simian immunodeficiency viruses infect monkeys. It has been suggested

that HIV evolved from viruses that originally infected monkeys in Africa.

It was somehow transmitted to people. There are many arguments to this theory. One is that HIV has only been found in human beings. It has never been isolated from any other animal species. Scientists believe The infection became widespread after significant social changes took place in Africa.

Somewhere around the 1960's and the 1970's. HIV was isolated as being the cause of AIDS in 1983, and 1984. Tests were then developed to detect the virus. These tests have been used to analyze stored tissues from people who had undetermined deaths in the 60's and the 70's. Scientists found that some of these people died from AIDS. During the 1990's an estimated one million people in the U. S. had the HIV infection or AIDS. There are millions more throughout the world(Drotman 165).

AIDS deaths has dropped significantly for the first time since the epidemic began in the early 1980's. They fell 13 percent in the first six months of 1996, to 22, 000 people, down from 24, 900 deaths in the same period a year earlier, reported by the Centers for Disease Control. The number of people diagnosed with AIDS still continues to grow, but the growth rate is slowing. From 1995 to 1996 the growth rate was less

than 2%. The growth rate from 1993 to 1994 was 5%. First signs of drop in deaths of AIDS victims came in January 1997, when New York City reported

a 30 percent drop in the number of Aids deaths in 1996. The Center for Disease Control credits better treatments, new drugs, and better access to treatment through state and federal programs. Some think that the decline

is unfortunately only a standstill, because for some patients the new drugs are not effective(Meyer A1).

Doctors and researchers have been doing

research on the virus. They have studied several drugs that stop the growth of HIV in laboratories. One of the drugs is zidovudine, formerly called azidothymidine and commonly known as AZT. Research suggest that azidothymidine

can delay the onset of opportunistic illnesses. This drug produces toxic side effects. Some other ones are didanosine(ddI), zalcitbine, which was formerly known as dideoxycytidine and commonly called ddc, and stavudine, which is commonly called D4T. These three drugs also produce dangerous

side effects. Researchers are investigating treatments to help restore normal function to the immune system. They believe that any eventual cure must stop the growth of the virus, prevent opportunistic illnesses, and restore the immune system(Drotman 164). Some vaccines are being tested on animals and as of 1993, one is being tested on people who are at very high risk(Nichols 11).

“ Magic” Johnson’s HIV is now undetectable, but not absent. Though he is not cured, powerful drugs have reduced the AIDS virus in his body to undetectable levels. Undetectable does not mean absent. Activists hope that his progress encourages people to get tested and take advantage of improved treatment. Thousands of HIV patients have had their infections recede to undetectable levels after taking drugs called protease inhibitor. Even though a person with undetectable virus levels can still infect other people. Even if the virus is undetectable in blood or semen, it can still be present in other areas such as intestines. Protease inhibitors reduce illnesses in infected people. These drugs are taken on a strict schedule along with two other AIDS drugs. It requires particular

timing. Some drugs must be taken an hour before eating or two hours after.

Even with this patients still get side effects. Some of the side effects

are nausea, vomiting, headaches, backaches, and gastrointestinal problems.

As many as forty percent of the people who take the concoction of drugs

develop a resistance to them either because the virus becomes resistant

after years of on other drugs, or because patients don't or are unable

to take the drugs as ordered. These wonder drugs are expensive costing

between \$12, 000 and \$15, 000 a year. Although these drugs are expensive

it is still worth prolonging a person's life.

The virus infects children and newborns,

too. Newborns become quite ill by age 1, because their immune system has

not fully developed. Most babies that are infected die by 18

months(Quackenbush

23).

Today kids need to know about HIV and AIDS.

They need to know how a person gets the virus, how it is spread, how they

won't get it, what it is, how they can protect themselves from it, and

what's going to happen to them if they get it. The real risk of infection

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for them is through sexual molestation by an infected adult. There are three main reasons why children need to know. One is natural curiosity.

AIDS is now an undeniable part of the world. They are curious about the world. They have questions about the world. Another reason is the anxiety children may have about the disease. They understand that AIDS is a very serious disease. The thing they don't understand is the concept of "not casually transmitted." The final reason is some children have family members

or friends with HIV or AIDS. The kids that have an infected family member or friend face many personal challenges. They get harassed by their peers because their peers don't know what HIV or AIDS is. They think that the kid has cooties or something. Children need to know about HIV and AIDS so they can understand and so they don't harass other kids about it(Quackenbush

27).

In the United States, federal, state, and

local government have provided funds for education, treatment, and research

of AIDS. Public health clinics have counseling and HIV-antibody testing to people who have symptoms or are at risk of infection(Drotman 164).

Community organizations hope that greater awareness will lead to more compassion and more funding. One project is the AIDS quilt. It was begun in 1986 by an organization called the NAMES Project. This quilt consists of thousands of individually designed panels, which memorializes a person who died of AIDS. This quilt has been displayed in many cities throughout the world(Drotman 164).

AIDS has killed many people. People need to be more aware and protect themselves so they don't become another statistic,

because HIV and AIDS are serious, deadly, and they will be with us for a long time. There will not be a cure found anytime soon, but hopefully there will be a cure found.