

Healthworks

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The global disease called AIDS recently celebrated its 20th birthday. In the early days of this horrible disease, predictions of the eventual tolls seemed impossible. Some estimated as many as 20 million victims by the year 2000. We were stunned by those figures which many thought were only scare tactics. Well, the numbers are in and the estimates weren't even close.

It is thought that the virus that causes AIDS has infected 60 million people and that number grows by 16,000 every day! Of those 60 million, 22 million have already died. AIDS rages on. Youth are high on the list of concern. More than 50% of all new cases are found in youth ages 13-24.

Initially, the AIDS virus appeared to be a disease unique to injection drug users and homosexual men. While these two groups continue to bear the majority of the disease burden of the nearly 1 million persons in North America, the number of those becoming infected through heterosexual transmission grows. Globally, around three-quarters became infected through sex between a man and a woman. This is of particular concern as young people in North America, even Adventists, are engaging in sex at alarming rates.

Drug therapy has played a very important role in the treatment of individuals living with HIV. Though very expensive the success of drug therapy may have had a negative impact on AIDS prevention efforts. For example, Magic Johnson was found to be HIV positive in 1991. Today, through the success of his excellent medical care along with exercise and a sound nutritional plan, Magic looks great. While this is good news for Magic and his family, he may be viewed as an example of how AIDS isn't as serious as we once thought. But AIDS is serious and the numbers of those being infected continue to increase.

Young girls are at particular risk for contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections through heterosexual contact. A close examination of the female reproductive anatomy reveals that a single layer of tissue covers the cervix. Once young women turn 23 or 24 years of age, the tissue covering the cervix transforms into a multi-layered type that is much more protective for organisms known to cause infections. Young girls are not anatomically ready for sexual intercourse.

Fully two-thirds of all cases of sexually transmitted diseases are found in youth under the age of 25. Three million US teens are diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease each year. Many of the organisms that cause these infections can lead to very serious health consequences. A virus that causes genital warts, called the human papillomavirus, is responsible for 50% of all cervical cancer cases in women. A virus common in our young people that is transmitted through sex, a behavior common among our young people, accounts for half of all cases of cervical cancer in women; sex to infection to cancer.

We must address these behaviors immediately and effectively, *before they happen*. That means that we must learn to be effective in the area of prevention. Logic suggests that we need to teach our kids more about AIDS. But don't be fooled. Our kids already know a lot about AIDS, how the virus is transmitted, etc. In 1995, Dr. Joyce Hopp, other colleagues, and I conducted a survey of students attending Adventist high schools throughout North America. Our purpose was to measure the level of accurate HIV/AIDS knowledge and sexual behaviors among the sample. In total, 1,748 students participated. An analysis of the data revealed that the students who had never had sex had a very high level of AIDS knowledge (91% correct). But, so did the students who had engaged in sex (89% correct). The difference between 91% and 89% is very small.

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Ambassadors of Compassion

The role of Christians in this world is to love sinners and to draw them to Jesus. Nothing has challenged the church more in the past 20 years than to apply that principle to people who have Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome—AIDS.

AIDS exploded into the world's consciousness just 20 years ago this year. The first five cases were reported from Los Angeles in June 1981. Today more than 36 million men, women and children worldwide are estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS and more than 22 million have died.

AIDS has become to the Christian church of the 21st century what leprosy was to Israel in the first century. Like the Jews of the first century, Christians of the 21st century at first shunned AIDS victims. It was the disease no "good" church member would get.

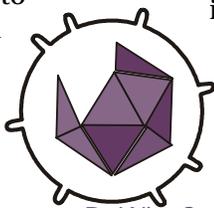
Many Adventist members correctly understand that AIDS is largely a lifestyle-caused disease. People who do not use IV drugs and who have a monogamous relationship with another monogamous partner have a slim chance of contracting AIDS.

Then we began to know Adventist members who were HIV-positive. AIDS victims became people, not statistics. People, even friends of ours, were HIV-positive. It challenged our beliefs about them, about us.

What a fast-paced 20 years this has been! Virtually every Adventist knows someone who has AIDS, someone who has died from AIDS, someone who grieves the loss of a loved one who died from AIDS.

From this 20 years of experience, two principles have become clear to Adventists who wrestle with how the Bible applies to contemporary life:

First, Jesus Christ does not condemn people who are HIV-positive or have AIDS. Jesus' response to leprosy is very clear. He touched them. He healed them. He made them an object of special attention and love. He gave them hope for their quality of life. The leprosy victims now had a future. They now had a chance to see their children grow up, to hold grandchildren on their laps, to continue to contribute to society. Jesus didn't just heal their disease, He gave them back their lives.



DeWitt S. Williams, EdD MPH CHES
Health Ministries Director, North American Division

As Christ's representatives on earth, we must treat AIDS victims with the same respect and dignity that Jesus showed to lepers. We may not be able to heal them with a touch, but we can proclaim hope and celebrate life and healing in the midst of suffering. It is a scandal that many people (Adventists included) suffer and grieve in silence and secret. Wherever there was hurt and helplessness, Jesus was there. He gave unconditional love and compassion. No questions asked. AIDS is a call for us to be ambassadors of compassion.

We must vow that all who are affected by this pandemic (regardless of religion, race, class, age, nationality, physical ability, gender or sexual orientation) will have access to our compassionate, non-judgmental care, respect, support and assistance. That's our Christian duty. Let's all do something special in our churches on World AIDS Day, December 1 – which happens to be a Sabbath.

Secondly, let's keep this issue in perspective. Other killer diseases spring just as surely from lifestyle habits as does AIDS. Heart disease and lung cancer will kill more people in the United States this year than AIDS.

Heart disease, most times, is a lifestyle-related disease; sedentary people who eat high-fat diets are heart disease candidates. That's us. That's me! Am I ready to recognize that my hard-driving, high-achieving work habits may be killing me?

Whether it's AIDS or lung cancer or heart disease, our lifestyles may very well be killing us! "We" need to repent of unhealthful living habits as much as "they" need to repent of drug usage, needle sharing and promiscuous behaviors.

Fortunately, there is a Savior who forgives. That's the great lesson for us. And God's boundless grace can fill our lives. That grace is available to help us love the victims of HIV/AIDS and have us change the habits that are robbing us of life. This grace is from Jesus, and we can receive it merely by asking.





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Our kids know a lot about AIDS but this hasn't solved the problem. We need to move beyond education alone.

Church is a great place to hear well-constructed and informative sermons about Jesus. But, a large percentage of our young people are leaving church about the same time they finish high school. The message alone isn't correcting this situation. As in HIV/AIDS, we must become effective in preventing this disease and in giving our kids a great reason to stay in church.

Over the past two decades much research has accumulated regarding the value in communication between parents and their kids. When parents talk to their kids about things like sex and drugs, their children are less likely to become involved in these behaviors. Communication is critical. But it is only effective when there is a good relationship between the parents and kids. Talk to your kids about sex, HIV/AIDS, drugs, etc. Communicate clearly.

Though the message of communication and relationships is clear, many parents are too busy, detached or unavailable. That takes us to the need to form caring relationships with all of the youth in our church. Maybe more of our kids would stay in church if someone cared about them.

The next time you go to church (or walk on your street) learn the names of the kids you meet, then greet them by name. This will start a relationship. After relationships begin, opportunities to talk will come.

Globally, churches have not fulfilled their responsibility regarding HIV/AIDS. AIDS is closely related to sex, a topic that we may be hesitant to address. Both Christians and Muslims sense that the open discussion of sex is both uncomfortable and best handled by experts. We need to be experts at communicating with our youth about sex. A recent article describing a situation in Nigeria is an excellent example of how we skirt the issue of sex. Although most Nigerians know that AIDS is connected to sex, most public education campaigns address the dangers of razor blades and sharing needles, but not sex.

Adventist culture is particularly hesitant to talk about safe sex. Talking might encourage our kids to practice sex knowing that if they just use protection, they will not be harmed. These issues need to be addressed. We must open our minds, mouths and hearts.

God has promised to move mountains. HIV/AIDS is a mountain.

by Gary L. Hopkins, MD, DrPH, Director Center for Prevention Research at Andrews University

check out our updated web site at www.nadadventist.org/hm



World AIDS Day has a special place in the history of the AIDS pandemic. Since 1988, December 1 has been a day bringing messages of compassion, hope, solidarity and understanding about AIDS to every country in the world.

World AIDS Day emerged from the call by the World Summit of Ministers of Health in January 1988 to open channels of communication, strengthen the exchange of information and experience and forge a spirit of social tolerance. Since then, World AIDS Day has received the support of governments, communities and individuals around the world. Each year, it is the only international day of coordinated action against AIDS.

This year's theme is "I Care...Do You?: Youth and AIDS in the 21st Century."

What is the World AIDS Campaign?

The first world AIDS Campaign took place in 1997 to emphasize that AIDS is not just a cause for concern one day of each year. The World AIDS Campaign now starts early each year and culminates on World AIDS Day. In 2001, it was decided by UNAIDS that the World AIDS campaign would start on September 1 and last for the three months until December 1.



Check out our newly revised web site!
www.nadadventist.org/hm



Now read *HealthWorks* online! Our site also features pages for directors and coordinators, links to other interesting sites, upcoming events, position statements, books, archives and much more.

September-October, 2001

1. Does HIV only affect gay people?
 - Yes Only gay men
 - No Only gay women
2. Approximately how many people are infected with HIV worldwide?
 - 1 million 15 million 30 million
 - 36 million 50 million
3. How can you tell if somebody has HIV or AIDS?
 - They carry an ID card
 - You cannot tell
 - They look tired and ill
4. Can you get AIDS from sharing the cup of an infected person?
 - No Yes
 - Only if you're drinking sweet tea
5. When was AIDS first recognized as a disease?
 - 1977 1981 1987
6. What are the specific symptoms of AIDS?
 - A rash from head to toe
 - There are no specific symptoms of AIDS
 - Your big toe aches every third Saturday of the month, especially when it's cold
7. Can mosquitos or other insects transmit HIV?
 - Yes No
8. What does STD stand for?
 - Sterilized Testing Developer
 - Special Treatment Doctor
 - Sexually Transmitted Disease
 - Standard Transmission Deficiency
9. Is there a cure for AIDS?
 - Yes No
10. When is World AIDS Day held?
 - January 1
 - June 1
 - December 1
11. What color is the AIDS Awareness Ribbon?
 - Blue Red
 - Green White
12. The virus in an HIV-Infected person is present in ...
 - Blood and sweat
 - Blood and sexual fluids
 - Sexual fluids and sweat
13. If a person becomes infected with HIV, does this mean that they have AIDS?
 - Yes No
14. What type of virus is HIV?
 - Indovirus Apexvirus
 - Retrovirus Embo-protein virus
15. What is the diameter of HIV?
 - 1/10000 of an inch 1/10000 of a centimeter
 - 1/10000 of a foot 1/10000 of a millimeter
16. Which HIV sub-type is most common to the Western World?
 - A B C D E
 - F G H I O
17. What percentage of those infected with HIV are women?
 - 19% 37% 46% 74%
18. Worldwide, what is the age range most infected with HIV?
 - 0 - 14 years old 15 - 24 years old
 - 25 - 34 years old 35 - 44 years old
 - 45 - 54 years old 55 years and older
19. Approximately, what is the cumulative number of children orphaned as a result of AIDS?
 - 2.7 million 11.2 million 12 million
20. Roughly how many people are infected with HIV per day?
 - 8,000 11,000 16,000

Answers:

(1) No (2) 36 million (3) You cannot tell (4) No (5) 1981 (6) No specific symptoms (7) No
 (8) Sexually Transmitted Disease (9) No (10) December 1 (11) Red (12) Blood and sexual fluid (13) No
 (14) Retrovirus (15) 1/10000 of a millimeter (16) B (17) 46% (18) 15 - 24 years old (19) 11.2 million (20) 16,000



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