

Dear all,

Many of the stories and rumors about HIV are exaggerated or just made up. In dealing with HIV, it's important to know reality from myth. Believing myths can result in fear, in denial, and even in damage to your health. Today we are sharing with you an article regarding information about myths and misperceptions related to HIV.

Myths and Misperceptions about HIV

Myths about HIV and HIV Treatment

The myth: "HIV doesn't cause AIDS."

The reality: If you don't have HIV, you don't get AIDS. If you have AIDS, you have HIV. There is 20 years of solid scientific proof on this. AIDS is not caused by party drugs, AZT, government conspiracies or anything else but a virus.

The myth: "It's not AIDS that kills people; it's the medicines they take!"

The reality: HIV medications, known as antiretroviral, don't cure HIV, but they can help keep people healthy for a longer time. People died from AIDS before ARV or any other drugs came out. In fact, death rates have gone down a great deal in the U.S. since new HIV medications came out in the mid-nineties. Unfortunately, the drugs do have side effects and toxicities (for some people) which in very rare cases have resulted in death.

Myths about HIV Tests

The myth: "The 'AIDS test' can't be trusted."

The reality: The 'AIDS test' measures your body's response to HIV, called antibodies. The HIV antibody test (called ELISA) is one of the most reliable medical tests. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), it is more than 99% accurate. In addition, all positive results are confirmed with another test (called the Western Blot) to insure no mistakes are made.

The myth: "Viral load tests don't really tell anything about a person's health."

The reality: Viral load measures the amount of HIV in a person's blood. Many studies have shown that people with high viral loads are much more likely to become ill or die than those with low viral loads.

Myths about HIV Transmission

The myth: "Straight people don't get HIV."

The reality: The majority of HIV+ people worldwide are heterosexual. Men infect women, and women infect men. Risk is not about labels, it is about behavior. A 'straight' woman who has unprotected sex with men is at more risk for HIV than a 'gay' man who always practices safe sex.

The myth: "I'm safe because I'm in a monogamous relationship (or married)."

The reality: Were you tested for HIV before you got into the relationship? Was your partner? Were both tests negative? And do you spend 24 hours a day together? If you're faithful, but he or she is not, or he or she was already HIV+ before you met, you can still get HIV.

The myth: "I'm safe because I'm a virgin."

The reality: Again, virgin is just a label. If you have had no sexual contact at all, you're fine. If you have had oral or anal sex, but consider yourself a 'virgin' because you haven't had vaginal sex, you are still at risk.

The myth: "Lesbians don't get HIV."

The reality: Women who only have sex with women are generally at lower risk, because of the sexual activities they engage in. But they can still get HIV. A recent case was reported where a lesbian was infected through sharing sex toys with her HIV+ partner. Also, many women who consider themselves lesbians occasionally have sex with men,

and can get infected that way.

The myth: "HIV can be spread through tears, sweat, mosquitoes, pools or casual contact."

The reality: HIV can only be transmitted through infected blood, semen, vaginal fluids and breast milk. The most common ways for HIV to be transmitted are through unprotected sexual contact and/or sharing needles with an HIV+ person. HIV can also be passed from mother to baby.

The following "bodily fluids" are NOT infectious:

- Tears
- Sweat
- Saliva
- Urine
- Feces

Casual contact is not considered risky because it does not include contact with blood or other infectious body fluids. Examples of casual contact include: social kissing, public venues (pools, theaters, and bathrooms), sharing drinks or eating utensils, etc. Insect bites do not transmit HIV.

Myths about Clinical Trials

The myth: "Clinical trials are unsafe and I won't be allowed to leave the study if I don't like it."

The reality: You are always in control. You can quit any study you participate in at any time for any reason. In some African-American and Latino communities, people know about the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, which was conducted before the government established strong ethical guidelines for the conduct of clinical trials. The Federal Government now has strict rules and regulations that all government and drug company researchers must follow to protect participants in clinical trials.

Myths about HIV are very dangerous. They can cause you to be afraid of something that is not dangerous. And they can make you feel like something is not dangerous when it really is!

So be careful. Sometimes seemingly well-informed or well-meaning people give out wrong information. If you have a question about HIV, talk to your doctor or your local AIDS organization.

Noman Farooq

Senior program Associate

PNAC Resource Centre

PAKISTAN NATIONAL AIDS CONSORTIUM

Phone: +92 51 4100935 / 4432094

Fax: +92 51 4100935

Address: H.No 441, Street 57, I-8/3 Islamabad Pakistan

Email: resourcecentre@pnac.net.pk

URL: <http://www.pnac.net.pk>

<http://www.aidspnac.org>