HIV, AIDS and the Workplace

You may be wondering what HIV and AIDS could have to do with your job and workplace. Well, it depends on the type of work you do. Some people, like health care workers, have to deal with HIV and AIDS every day. Most of us, though, don't need to give much thought to HIV or AIDS when it comes to our jobs. And that makes a lot of sense, because HIV is not spread through the type of casual day-to-day contact that most of us have with other people in our jobs. On the other hand, it does make sense to be familiar with HIV and AIDS for our own personal health, as well as with the situations that might come up at work that do involve HIV and AIDS.

What you should know about HIV, AIDS and the workplace:

- HIV is the virus that causes AIDS, a disease that destroys a person's immune system.
- There are only a few ways that a person can be infected with HIV - most of which don't involve work-related situations.
- It is easy to protect yourself from being infected with HIV, both in your personal life and in workplace settings.

Some general information about HIV/AIDS:

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is the final stage of an infection caused by the **Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)**. HIV attacks the body's immune system, hurting the body's ability to fight off diseases and other infections.

There is no cure for HIV infection or AIDS. There are also no clear symptoms of HIV infection, although some people may have flu-like symptoms for a few days after they are infected with HIV. But, even if an infected person has no symptoms, feels, and looks healthy, he or she can still pass the virus to others.

HIV is spread from person to person in the following body fluids:

- blood
- semen
- vaginal secretions
- breastmilk

HIV is **NOT** spread through the environment; it is a very fragile blood-borne virus. HIV-infected persons do not pose a threat to co-workers or clients during casual, day-to-day activities and contacts.

You CANNOT be infected with HIV through:

- handshakes
- hugs or casual touching
- close working conditions
- telephones, office equipment, or furniture
- sinks, toilets, or showers
- dishes, utensils, or food
- sneezing or coughing
- air
- water
- insects

There are only a few ways for a person to come in contact with HIV:

- by having sex, either anal, oral, or vaginal, without the use of a condom;
- by sharing needles, syringes, and other instruments that break the skin, such as tattoo and/or ear/body piercing needles;
- from an HIV-infected mother to her baby during pregancy, birth, or breastfeeding; and
- by coming in contact with HIV-infected blood either through an open wound or through a blood transfusion. Risks from transfusions, however, are now very low because of blood-screening, which started in 1985.

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How HIV/AIDS affects you in your workplace:
As you can see from the information on the last page, most of the behaviors that pass HIV from one person to another do not occur in the workplace. The only way that most people in the average workplace could be exposed to HIV would be if they had an open wound and someone else's infected blood entered their body through that broken skin.

How to avoid HIV infection in the workplace:
It is easy to avoid being exposed to HIV and other blood-borne diseases by using good personal hygiene and common sense at all times:

- keep broken skin covered with a clean, dry bandage;
- avoid direct contact with blood spills;
- wear gloves to clean spills that contain visible blood; and
- clean blood spills with an appropriate disinfectant or 1:10 solution of freshly mixed household bleach and water. After cleanup, wash hands thoroughly with soap and running water.

Ways to reduce your risk for HIV infection in your personal life:

- Do not have sex (abstain)
- Delay having sex until you are in a faithful relationship with one person who you know does not have HIV.
- If you choose not to abstain from sex or to limit sex to one faithful, uninfected partner, then always use a latex condom every time you have sex (oral, anal, or vaginal). If used correctly and every time you have sex, latex condoms can provide protection against HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
- If you have a drug habit, do not share needles or syringes. If you can't stop sharing needles/syringes, clean them with bleach and then rinse them with water between every use. Also, do not share any other type of needles, such as tattoo and ear/body piercing needles.
- The best thing for your health is to stop using drugs. If you need help to stop using, call the National Drug Abuse Hotline at 1-800-662-4357.

If you work with someone who has HIV and/or AIDS:
If you have a cold, flu or other virus, remember that people with HIV or AIDS do not have a healthy immune system. They are more likely to become ill from a virus that a healthy person's body could easily fight. Remember, too, that people with HIV or AIDS are just like anyone else living with a disease: they need caring, support, and understanding.

For HIV/STD testing locations in Texas, call: 2-1-1

For other HIV/STD questions, call:
1 (800) CDC-INFO (English/Español)
1 (888) 232-6348 (TTY)

For more information, go to: www.dshs.state.tx.us/hivstd

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