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What is HIV and AIDS?

HIV stands for **H**uman **I**mmunodeficiency **V**irus.

AIDS stands for **A**cquired **I**mmunodeficiency **S**yndrome.



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HIV is a virus that attacks your immune system. Over time, your immune system may grow weak and you can become sick with different illnesses. After time, your immune system will no longer be able to defend your body from infections, diseases or cancers that can kill you. This advanced stage of the HIV disease is called AIDS.

How many Canadians are infected with HIV?

It is difficult to know the exact number of Canadians infected with HIV because many people have not been tested for HIV or have been tested anonymously. The latest research shows that there are approximately 49,800 people living with HIV in Canada. Of this number, about 15,000 do not know that they are HIV positive. Each year in Canada, there are about 4,200 new infections.

The trend of the epidemic is changing dramatically. Before 1999, the proportion of new infections caused by injection drug use (IDU) had steadily increased from 2% during 1981-1983 to 24% between 1987-1990 and to 47% in 1996. However, in 1999 that the proportion dropped to 34%. On the other hand, the proportion of new infections in men who have sex with men (MSM) showed a steady decline from over 80% in 1981-1983 to 30% in 1996. Recently, however, there has been a sharp increase in the proportion of new infections in MSM to 38% in 2000. The proportion of new infections in heterosexuals has increased steadily in the last two decades, reaching 21% of the new infections in 2000. Women represented 14% of the HIV infections in 2000, compared to 11% in 1996 (see Question 4 "Who can get HIV or AIDS?").

How many Canadians have AIDS?

Approximately 17,000 people in Canada have been diagnosed with AIDS. This number doesn't include people who are infected with HIV but have not yet become sick.

There have been 11,748 reported deaths due to AIDS in Canada. Since 1995, the number of reported AIDS deaths each year has declined, with a 92.5% drop in 1999 as compared to 1995. This is probably due to improved HIV treatment (medication) which delays the onset of AIDS.

Are there general trends?

The number of AIDS cases reported and the number of AIDS-related deaths each year is dropping (due to improved treatment). But the number of HIV infections is still rising and more people from a variety of different population groups are being infected.

Remember, behaviours and activities that put you at risk for HIV infection also put you at risk for infection by other viruses. Co-infection (having more than one illness at one time) rates are increasing in Canada, particularly for HIV and hepatitis C, with approximately 11,200 people infected with both viruses (see Question 29 "Is there a connection between HIV and hepatitis C?").

For more information, contact your local AIDS service organization or health care practitioner.

For more copies of this fact sheet or other documents on HIV/AIDS, contact the Canadian HIV/AIDS Clearinghouse, 400-1565 Carling Avenue, Ottawa, ON K1Z 8R1
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