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## AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome)

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**Description:** AIDS is a disease caused by a virus called Human Immunodeficiency Virus or HIV for short. The virus attacks the immune system so that the body cannot fight off infection by other germs.

**Symptoms:** “AIDS” refers to “full-blown” disease. Most people who have the HIV virus do not have any signs or symptoms of disease. It may be years before an infectious person becomes symptomatic. However, persons who have the virus can still spread infection, even if it is “silent.” When symptoms do appear, they may include weight loss and failure to grow, swelling of the lymph nodes, chronic diarrhea and sores that do not heal. If a child has any of these symptoms, it does not necessarily mean he has AIDS – all of these symptoms can be found with other diseases too.

**How it is Spread:** HIV is not easy to catch. It is spread through blood, semen and vaginal fluid. It is not spread through urine, stool, tears or saliva unless these have blood in them. The virus is spread:

- 1.) Through contact with an infectious person’s blood such as shared dirty needles.
- 2.) By having sexual contact with a person who has the virus.
- 3.) From an infected mother to her unborn baby through the placenta or during the process of birth.
- 4.) From an infected mother breastfeeding her baby.
- 5.) By exposure to infected blood through a blood transfusion.

**You Cannot get HIV by:**

- 1.) Hugging, shaking hands or kissing.
- 2.) Sharing plates, cups or silverware with an infected person.
- 3.) Using a telephone or toilet seat after someone who is infected.
- 4.) Sharing a swimming pool with someone who is infected.

Even family members of HIV-positive persons have not been infected, even though they have eaten after the person or even shared the same toothbrush.

**Incubation Period:** Highly unpredictable – from several months to several years.

**How Long Can A Person Pass The Infection To Others?** Once a person gets HIV, it does not go away. The person can spread the infection to others for life.

**Responsibilities of Parents and Caregivers:**

Children who are infected with HIV or have AIDS may generally continue to be in a child care setting, unless the child bites or scratches other children. However, it is actually the infected child himself who is in danger of getting other types of infection from other children.

This is because the HIV-infected child may not be able to fight off otherwise common germs. For example, a germ that causes a cold in a healthy child may cause pneumonia in the HIV-infected child.

If they do inform you, you have the right to decide whether he stays in your home. It is strongly suggested that you discuss it with your local health department. However, keep in mind that HIV-infected children pose little or no threat to caregivers or to other children. If you do take care of an HIV-infected child, be sure to notify the parents immediately if he is exposed to another person with chickenpox or measles. These diseases can be fatal in HIV-infected children.

\*Notify the local health department about persons with AIDS or who are HIV positive, even though chances are they will already know about it.

Legally, parents do not have to tell anyone their child is HIV positive, except the local health department.

**Control of Spread:**

- Because you do not always know who may have “silent” infection, do not come into contact with the blood of any child with your bare hands. Keep disposable gloves handy and wear them if you have to wipe a bloody nose, for example. Clean the area appropriately and always wash your hands after you remove the gloves.
- As always, wash your hands after changing the child’s diaper, helping the child to use the bathroom, wiping his nose, etc. Clean and sanitize equipment and toys as you normally would. Use the same precautions necessary to prevent the spread of any blood-borne infection (including Hepatitis B).

**Treatment:** Currently, there is no vaccine to prevent HIV. Some of the other infections that HIV-infected people get such as pneumonia, can be treated with antibiotics or other drugs. Although there is no cure for HIV, many drugs assist in prolonging life expectancy.

**Comments:** It may take 12-18 months to establish the HIV status of infants born to HIV-positive mothers. This is due to the presence of the mother’s antibodies in the child during the first months of life. Therefore, the child care staff would use standard precautions whether the child’s HIV status is determined or not.

