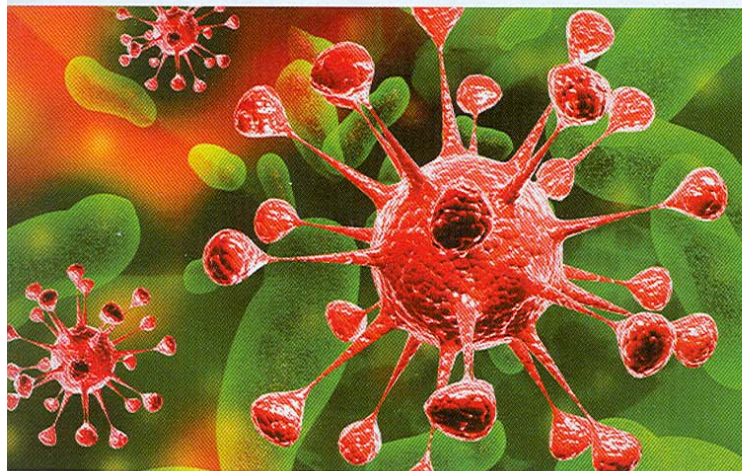


HIV and AIDS

What is new and what to do
JEANNETTE BONDURANT, AID FOR AIDS

It's been nearly 29 years since the first advanced human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infections were diagnosed and labeled "acquired immunodeficiency syndrome" or AIDS here in Los Angeles. Intense research has led to the development of effective antiretroviral therapy (the famous "three-drug cocktails") so, why are people still dying?



President Barack Obama released his aggressive national strategy to deal with the HIV/AIDS epidemic on July 13. To meet his goals, an unprecedented commitment to collaboration, efficiency, and innovation is required. It calls for refocusing existing efforts for better results with current funding, and highlights the need for additional investments. A broader public commitment to HIV is required.

What you can do

- 1) Get tested now, even if you feel awkward about it, think you are not in a high-risk category, or had a negative test more than a year ago. Early detection and treatment is a leading measure of longevity. New tests use a mouth swab or finger prick. Often, tests are free.
- 2) Use latex condoms, even if you and your partner are both HIV-positive—you can be infected multiple times. There are different strains—some resistant to many medications. Your current medications may not protect you.
- 3) If you are taking HIV medications, commit to taking them daily as prescribed—stopping and starting causes HIV to become resistant, allowing your disease to get worse.
- 4) Seek a doctor experienced in treating HIV—monitoring

medications, side effects, and other health concerns is important to maintaining your health. HIV may cause increased risk for heart disease, kidney problems, and bone fractures. Test for viral hepatitis; liver disease from hepatitis can be treatable and preventable.

- 5) Stop risky behaviors or use safer practices (condoms, clean needles). High-risk behaviors include unprotected sex, sex with multiple partners, injection drug use, and behavior-altering drugs like cocaine, alcohol, and crystal methamphetamine.
- 6) Talk openly about HIV prevention.

The Rev. Calvin O. Butts, chairman, National Black Leadership Coalition on AIDS; Pastor, Abyssinian Baptist Church; and member, United States President's Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS, said, "It is a daunting fact that HIV/AIDS has grown to pandemic proportions in communities of color, particularly among our young people. Work is still needed to put into place policies that address the alarming numbers we have been seeing for decades."

"Those in communities of color must do their part. It is imperative to be tested ... we must also compassionately embrace those who are infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS, and ensure we care for the physical, mental, and spiritual needs of all people in our communities."

What's new in research and treatment?

- 1) Early treatment is essential for longevity. In June, the federal and drug administration approved a test that simultaneously detects both antigens and antibodies for HIV. Antigens appear earlier than antibodies. This means treatment can start earlier. It is the first FDA-approved diagnostic test for use in young children and pregnant women.
- 2) Transmission from HIV-infected mothers to their babies in the womb can be almost completely prevented with early diagnosis and treatment of the mother. If you are considering pregnancy, ask for an HIV test.
- 3) A vaginal gel for sexual intercourse that can block HIV was

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developed and is being tested by scientists globally. In July, encouraging trial results were presented at the International AIDS Conference.

- 4) A vaginal ring that releases anti-HIV medication to prevent

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transmission of the virus during intercourse is being studied at Albert Einstein College of Medicine.

5) Lectins are naturally-occurring chemicals in plants. University of Michigan researchers found that in test tube studies, lectins from bananas were as potent as two current HIV medications. This may lead to a less expensive component for vaginal or rectal HIV-blocking gels for intercourse. (Don't try this at home with bananas—it's not the same thing.)

6) People with sexually transmitted diseases—genital herpes, gonorrhea, syphilis, chlamydia—and women with yeast and bacterial vaginal infections have increased risk of HIV infection.

7) Two new, potent antibodies against HIV were discovered, noted the journal, *Science*, last September—the first antibodies to have been identified in more than 10 years. This may help build an effective vaccine.

8) The inexpensive antibiotic minocycline was found, by researchers at Johns Hopkins University, to target silently HIV-infected T-cells, where the virus lies dormant then comes back to life to spread infection. The inability to identify and target these inactive HIV-infected cells has been a major stumbling block for a cure.

9) People who naturally lack the human cellular receptor CCR5 are resistant to the most common type of HIV. Researchers at UCLA School of Medicine recently announced a study that uses an experimental form of gene therapy with human stem cells to block the cell's ability to make CCR5 and thereby not be susceptible to HIV infection. This new research may lead to a treatment that could make immune cells resistant to HIV.

New focus on African-American HIV/AIDS

To better address the HIV/AIDS crisis among African-Americans, the traditional focus on high-risk behaviors has widened to include community issues that may play a role in high infection rates. The Centers for Disease Control launched a five-year campaign in March 2010 targeting youth. The "i know" project uses Twitter, Facebook, texting, and the web, and features Jamie Foxx in the first message.

Discussions concern the need for peer education, age- and gender-specific counseling to increase testing and remove social stigmas, the effects of poverty, and limited social mobility for sexual partners. Other topics include healthcare access, recreational opportunities, needle-exchange programs, small business loans to

move out of poverty, and into adequate housing.


"It is clear that housing is healthcare," said Terry Goddard II, Executive Director, Alliance for Housing and Healing, parent organization of Aid For AIDS, the Los Angeles-based nonprofit that has made housing a focus for 27 years.

Goddard said, "The president's strategy recognizes the importance of support to those with HIV and co-occurring health conditions are challenged to meet their basic needs, such as housing. Without the security of a stable home, most people cannot maintain treatment regimens and proper nutrition."

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