



What is Aids?

Aids stands for the **Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome**.

It is a serious condition which attacks the immune system - which is what stops your body from getting ill. People with Aids can die after developing different kinds of diseases which the body would normally fight off by itself.

What is HIV?

HIV stands for **Human Immunodeficiency Virus**.

There is a lot of evidence that says the HIV virus leads to Aids.

The virus slowly multiplies inside the body and eventually destroys the body's ability to fight off illnesses.

How do you get it?

- * It can be passed on through blood and other body fluids like semen (though not saliva).
- * It is spread through having unprotected sex with an infected partner or by injecting drugs if infected drug addicts share needles.
- * Before 1983 there were some cases of people catching Aids from blood transfusions, but this is virtually impossible now because blood is screened.
- * Pregnant women with Aids can pass the virus on to their babies at birth or through breast milk. This is the main way that children - especially in Africa - get Aids since women cannot afford a preventive treatment.



How do you know if you've got it?

It's hard to know if you've got it straight away without having a blood test, because people with HIV can stay healthy for years before developing Aids.

It's still not known if all people who get infected with the HIV virus end up getting Aids - some have remained well for more than 10 years.



How common is it?

Millions of people around the world die of Aids-related illnesses every year:

³⁵/₁₇ In Africa more people die from Aids than any other disease - 25m people there have the HIV virus.

³⁹/₁₇ Eastern Europe - especially Russia - has the fastest-growing HIV epidemic in the world.

³⁵/₁₇ New cases of HIV are at an all-time high in the UK, with 3,435 new cases found in 2000.

³⁹/₁₇ It is thought that by the end of 2001 around the world 2.7m children under the age of 15 will have Aids.

Can it be cured?

There is no cure for Aids, but there are drugs that can slow down the HIV virus, and slow down the damage to the immune system.

But there is no way to get all the HIV out of your body.

There are other drugs that HIV carriers can take to prevent or to treat some of the related infections.

Scientists are hopeful that a vaccine against the HIV virus will be found in the near future.