

# Sexuality & More

by Jennifer Caseley & Steve Ellis

In its first fifteen years of documented existence, AIDS has caused much pain in the lives of its victims and their friends and family. Even the relatively tranquil and conservative Island many UPEI students call home has not been able to escape this disease and its devastating effects.

AIDS, or Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome is the disease which is caused by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus, HIV. As with all viruses, HIV attacks cells in the body. In the case of HIV, there is a target cell, namely the T-cells of the immune system.

T-cells are instrumental in the bodies chain of defense, and once they die, they are not replenished by the body. Eventually there are so few T-cells that the immune system cannot function properly and the body is left open to disease and the infected person begins to display the symptoms of AIDS. Unfortunately, once a person has AIDS there is little that can be done. At present, AIDS is always fatal.

## HISTORY

The disease was first announced in a memo at the Centre for Disease Control in Atlanta Georgia, in the summer of 1981. It had been noted that several gay men in California and New York had developed rare cancers that had been diagnosed previously only in people who couldn't fight off infections because their immune systems were suppressed either because they were born with a disorder of the immune system, or they were taking immunosuppressant drugs. Soon after the first reports, more cases began to appear. By the end of the year, doctors realized that they were dealing with a new disease. The AIDS epidemic had begun.

Many people speculated about the origin of the virus. One hypothesis was that the disease came from the African green monkey. Sixty percent of these monkeys carry a virus which is similar to HIV, but does not make them ill. This same virus, when injected into Rhesus monkeys, which are close genetic relatives to humans, causes disease to develop.

Different ideas have been developed to explain how the virus was transferred to humans. These are only speculations, but it is known that once in humans, the virus adapted to our physiology and became transferrable by person-to-person contact.

## ARE YOU AT RISK?

AIDS is spread through the transfer of bodily fluids. Bodily fluids which can contain the AIDS virus include blood, semen, vaginal secretions, and any fluids which contain a visible amount of blood. Fluids that are not capable of spreading the disease include tears, sweat, saliva, vomit, urine and faeces -- as long as they contain no visible blood.

Certain groups of people are at higher risk for acquiring AIDS than others. These groups include:

- homosexual men
- bisexual men
- intravenous drug abusers
- people from geographical areas where there is a high prevalence of AIDS
- haemophiliacs who received blood products between 1980 and November 1985
- people who received blood transfusions during the same period
- sexual partners of any of the above
- men and women who have many different sexual partners
- male or female prostitutes
- infants born to mothers in high risk groups
- women who have been artificially inseminated with unscreened donor semen.

Though the information above may suggest so, AIDS is not a gay disease. As of 1988, only thirty percent of the total number of worldwide AIDS sufferers were gay or bisexual men. As well, lesbians are at a relatively low risk of becoming infected.

There are activities which you can avoid to lower the chance that you will contract HIV. High risk activities include:

- sharing intravenous drug needles
- vaginal intercourse without a condom
- vaginal oral sex, without a dam, when a woman is having a period
- anal intercourse without a condom (Note: According to Bobbi Smith of AIDS PEI, between thirty and forty percent of PEI couples practice anal sex.)
- sharing sex toys without using a new condom, dam or cot each time the toy is used on or by a partner or washing said toy in a gentle bleach solution.

## CLOSER TO HOME

On June 30th, 1995 the Laboratory Centre for Disease Control (Health Canada) released its latest statistics on AIDS in Canada. As of that date, 11,644 cases of AIDS had been reported in Canada, which is almost ten times as many as there were in 1988. On PEI, twelve cases had been reported, and an additional fourteen people had been diagnosed as HIV positive.

Andrea Scott of AIDS PEI pointed out that the PEI statistics underestimate the true situation. Many residents go out of province to have AIDS testing done, and their results are not counted in the PEI statistics. AIDS is more of a problem than the statistics show.

If the statistics quoted above do not

frighten you, they should. AIDS is still very much a threat for people from all walks of life.

To fight against this threat, and to help Island residents deal with the devastation of AIDS, AIDS PEI was formed. This education and action organization does much to reduce the threat of AIDS on PEI.

In addition to their regular activities, during the first week of October, AIDS PEI will be actively involved along with other organizations across Canada in the promotion of AIDS awareness. Activities will include an information blitz in the form of displays and speaking sessions.

Perhaps the most important event of the week is "the WALK '95". It is a fund-raiser for urgently needed funds for continued HIV/AIDS education, prevention and support services on PEI. This seven kilometre pledge walk will take place on October first, and starts from the Arts Guild in Charlottetown.

If you are interested in taking part in "The Walk '95", talk to the leaders of the societies and clubs you belong to on campus as they may already have a team. If not, you can talk to Tara Inman, VP Internal of the Student Union, and either start your own team or join the Student Union team. For pledge sheets and additional information, contact AIDS PEI.

Get smart and don't get AIDS.

For more information about AIDS and HIV, check in the UPEI library, the student medical centre, or contact AIDS PEI at 566-2437 (toll free: 1-800-314-2437).

Stay tuned. The topic for next weeks column is male circumcision.

## STUDENT HEALTH PLAN

The Student Health Plan is designed to supplement existing provincial medicare.

If you have other coverage, you may apply to opt out of the Student Health Plan. You must bring with you to the SU office on Wednesday, Thursday or Friday (a) proof of existing coverage, (b) proof of full time UPEI registration.

For more information regarding benefits and claims procedures, contact the Student Union Office, 1st floor of the Barn, 566-0530, 9:00am - 4:00pm, Monday through Friday.

**DEADLINE TO OPT OUT IS FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 1995.**

