

Part 6 -

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES AND HIV



A series on HIV/AIDS for Inuit Communities

Part 6 - Sexually transmitted diseases and HIV

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D e d i c a t i o n

*Did you
hear me
when I
spoke?*



Leetia babysitting

Before her death from AIDS in 1992, Leetia Geetah traveled to many northern communities to dispel myths and educate Inuit about HIV/AIDS. Several years earlier, fear of AIDS had forced Leetia out of her community and into care of strangers in the south. That experience led her to become the remarkable AIDS educator she will be remembered as.

Through her honesty about her own life and her own health, other Inuit began to understand the risks and the challenges HIV/AIDS is for all of us. Leetia was able to show us the difference one person can make.

Message From The President

Veronica Dewar

I am very concerned about the health and well-being of Inuit. Becoming healthier involves caring about ourselves, learning about what makes us healthy and practicing what we learn.

Whole communities in other countries have been devastated because of HIV/AIDS leaving many children orphaned.

Many of us have heard of the story of Leetia Geetah and I personally know of

several other Inuit with HIV infection. Several Inuit have already passed away due to AIDS. I have learned of an alarming trend that more and more youth including Aboriginal youth are becoming infected. Youth infections are not just about lack of information or poor choices, they are closely tied to issues of self-esteem.

Many of us know how to protect ourselves from HIV, but don't.

This series of booklets is a tool for you to address your own and your community's needs for information. Everyone needs to know the facts. Our communities must decide how we are going to educate ourselves and our children. Traditionally, Inuit have known what to do to survive. HIV has presented us with a challenge. With information and action, it is a challenge we can meet.

Acknowledgments

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Forward

This six-part series provides basic information on HIV and AIDS. The titles are 1. *HIV/AIDS: The Basics*; 2. *Your Immune System and Testing for HIV*; 3. *HIV: The Risks*; 4. *Protecting Yourself from HIV*; 5. *Women and HIV/AIDS*; and, 6. *Sexually Transmitted Diseases and HIV*. This series does not use reported or estimated rates of HIV infection for Inuit populations because these numbers can be misleading and are always changing. Talk to a nurse, health worker or doctor at a nursing station or health centre for help with information or about services, treatment and care that are available to you in your community, your region or in urban centres. Pauktuutit has plans to prepare and distribute information for people living with HIV/AIDS and possibly other resources as funds become available.

STDs AND HIV

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are infections caused by bacteria or germs that are most often caught when people have unprotected sex. Although most STDs can be cured, many of them create problems that can last a long time, sometimes these problems are life-long. Sometimes people have no idea that they have an STD and pass it on to other people without knowing it. Anyone who is having sex should learn the signs of STDs so they can get treated by a doctor or at the health center or nursing station.

People who have STDs that are not treated have a greater chance of catching HIV than other people. Different STDs need different treatment. When you are given medication to treat an STD, it is important that you finish taking it. If you don't, the infection is likely to return and you will likely give the infection to your sexual partner. While you are taking the medication, it is important that you do not

drink alcohol. Alcohol will make the medication less effective in curing your STD. When you have finished the medication, you must go back to the doctor or nursing station for a follow-up exam to make sure the infection is completely gone.

Newborn babies can be infected with some STDs while they are in the womb or during delivery. Severe eye infections, blindness and pneumonia are only a few of the complications that can affect babies born with an STD.

In the north many people have STDs, so it is especially important for Inuit to understand how to tell if they have an STD. Your community health center or nursing station can provide you with more information and statistics about STDs in your region.

People who have STDs that are not treated have a greater chance of catching HIV than other people.

CHLAMYDIA

POSSIBLE SIGNS:

- BURNING WHEN YOU URINATE (PEE)
- DISCHARGE (PUS) LEAKING FROM YOUR VAGINA OR PENIS
- ABDOMINAL PAIN (WOMEN)
- LOWER BACK PAIN (WOMEN)

Chlamydia is caused by a type of bacteria and is one of the most common STDs, especially in the north. If you have a burning feeling when you go to the bathroom to urinate (pee), or if you have pus leaking out of your penis or your vagina, you should go to the health center or nursing station and get checked to see if you have chlamydia. Chlamydia can also get into your throat, rectum (bum) or eyes.

If a man has chlamydia and does not get it treated, his penis may become infected and swollen. When not treated chlamydia can cause scarring on a man's penis, which can cause him to be sterile.

If a woman has chlamydia and does not get it treated, it can cause a serious problem with her private parts called Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID). It can

IMPORTANT NOTE:

- OFTEN THERE ARE NO SYMPTOMS AT ALL

affect all of the reproductive organs inside her body. If PID is not treated, scarring can occur which can leave her unable to have children or more likely to have ectopic (tubal) pregnancies.

Chlamydia is easily treated with an antibiotic. Whenever you are given an antibiotic you must be sure to take it all, even if you are feeling better, or else all of the germs that caused the infection will not be killed and the infection could come back. Some people believe that when they get an STD treated with an antibiotic they will never get it again. **NOT TRUE!** Antibiotics only cure the infection you have right now. They cannot protect you from getting chlamydia or any other STD again in the future.

GONORRHEA

SIGNS:

- THICK PUS LEAKING FROM YOUR PENIS, VAGINA OR RECTUM
- BURNING SENSATION WHEN YOU URINATE
- ABDOMINAL PAIN OR TENDERNESS (WOMEN)
- CHANGES IN MENSTRUATION

Gonorrhea is another STD that is caused by a bacteria. People with gonorrhea generally have thick pus leaking from their private parts (vagina, penis, or rectum). Some people with gonorrhea, especially women, have no signs at all.

If you have gonorrhea and you do not get it treated with antibiotics, the bacteria can get into your blood and move to other parts of your body. It could cause damage

to your private parts that may prevent you from having children. In some women it increases the likelihood of Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID).

Gonorrhea is easily treated with antibiotics. Whenever you are given antibiotics it is important to take them all, even if you feel better, to make sure all the germs are killed and the infection does not come back.

SYPHILIS

FIRST SIGNS

- SORES ON YOUR PRIVATE PARTS OR BUM
- RASH ON YOUR BODY
- SORE OR SORES IN YOUR MOUTH OR THROAT

Syphilis is caused by another kind of bacteria. It is spread through having unprotected sex. An infected person can give it to any sexual partner they have. Syphilis is a very serious STD because like HIV, if it is not treated with medicine, people can die from it. The first signs that a person has syphilis are sores that show up on their private parts, rectum or in their mouth or throat. Most often these sores do not hurt. If you have had unprotected sex and find sores on these parts of your body it is very important to go to the health center or nursing station and have them checked. If left untreated, the first signs of

UNTREATED SYPHILIS CAN CAUSE:

- BLINDNESS
- DAMAGE TO YOUR HEART AND BRAIN
- DEATH

syphilis will go away and come back many times for ten or even more years. Although treatment will deal with the infection, it will not be able to fix any permanent damage that has been done by not getting treatment.

To find out if you have syphilis you will need a blood test. You can get the test at your health center or nursing station. Syphilis is often treated with penicillin that is given through a needle into the muscles of your bum. It will take a couple of weeks to make sure all of the syphilis bacteria are killed.

HERPES

FIRST SIGNS

- HEADACHE, FEVER
- SWOLLEN GLANDS
- ITCHING OR BURNING PRIVATE PARTS
- BLISTERS OR SORES ON YOUR PRIVATE PARTS
- BLEEDING FROM THE VAGINA AFTER SEX
- UNUSUAL VAGINAL FLUID

Herpes is an infection caused by two viruses, herpes one and herpes two. These two viruses cause both cold sores on the mouth and sores on your private parts. You catch herpes by touching the sores of a person who has it. For instance, if the cold sore on the mouth of one person touches the private parts of another person during oral sex, it is likely the person without the sores will catch herpes on their private parts. Usually, it takes about three weeks for the first signs of herpes to show up, but sometimes it takes a few months.

After about two to four weeks the signs of herpes usually go away on their own, but if you have herpes you can give it to someone else even when you have no signs. **People who have the signs of herpes should not have sex of any kind.** Anyone who has had herpes on their private parts should use condoms every time they have sex.

A pregnant woman who has herpes can give it to her baby during delivery. Because it is very dangerous for the baby, the doctor may suggest a C section (cesarean section). If a woman knows she or her partner has herpes, it is important for her to tell her doctor, nurse or community health worker.

The signs of herpes come back for most people but may be less uncomfortable after the first infection. **There is no cure for herpes**, but there are a lot of different medicines that doctors use to treat it. Some medicines come as pills, some as a cream and others have to be given by needle. It is important for you to talk to your doctor, nurse or community health worker if you think you may have herpes.

**People who have the signs of herpes
should not have sex of any kind.**

GENITAL WARTS

Genital warts is an STD that is caused by a virus. They are rough warts that can be found on a person's rectum, a man's penis or on the outside of a woman's vagina. They can also be found on a woman's cervix (inside her body) or on the inside of a person's rectum. The warts do not hurt but they can make having sex a bit painful.

If these warts are not treated with medicine they can cause serious changes inside your rectum, vagina or penis. The virus that causes genital warts has been

linked to cervical and rectal cancer. They can be passed from mothers to babies during delivery.

A doctor can remove the warts by freezing them off with a laser, with medicine that is painted on them, or sometimes with an injection.

HEPATITIS

Hepatitis is an infection that is caused by a virus. It can make your liver swell and over time can cause a very severe form of liver disease. If you catch hepatitis, your immune system will make antibodies to protect you from getting it again. People with HIV who catch hepatitis often get very sick and are more likely to have liver damage from the infection. There is no cure for hepatitis. In fact, there are very few medicines that will help someone with hepatitis.

FIRST SIGNS

- FEELING TIRED
- SORE JOINTS AND MUSCLES
- THROWING UP
- FEVER
- DIARRHEA
- LOSING WEIGHT
- YELLOW EYES OR SKIN

There are three different kinds of hepatitis — A, B, and C.

HEPATITIS

HEPATITIS A

HEPATITIS A is a kind of hepatitis people can catch from water or food that is infected. You could also get it from touching someone's stool if they have it, or by having oral contact with someone's anus. This disease can make you very sick, but most people get better.

HEPATITIS B

HEPATITIS B is a very serious kind of hepatitis. It can make you very sick. Although most people get better, some will develop severe liver disease or cancer. It is passed from person to person in much the same way as HIV is. Touching or sharing blood and body fluids can cause someone to catch hepatitis B. The saliva of a person with hepatitis B has enough virus in it to pass it on through kissing. Sharing needles for any purpose, including

tattooing or piercing, is another way people can catch hepatitis B. Hepatitis B can be passed from an infected mother to her baby.

There is a vaccination for hepatitis B. If you are sexually active, using street drugs or working in health care, it is a good idea to talk to your doctor about getting a vaccination. You can only have the vaccination if you have not had hepatitis B before.

HEPATITIS

HEPATITIS C

HEPATITIS C is caused by a very different virus than hepatitis A or B. It is rarely spread through having sex. It is most often caught by coming in contact with a person's blood (sharing needles for street drugs, tattooing or piercing with a person who has it). There is no vaccination for hepatitis C but there are some treatments available. Hepatitis C doesn't usually make people very sick, but can cause severe liver disease or cancer.

For more information about hepatitis contact:

The Canadian Liver Foundation
1320 Yonge St., Suite 301
Toronto, Ontario, M4T 1X2
Tel: 1-800-563-5483

**These are only some of the STDs people can catch.
If you have concerns or you need more information
about STDs, speak to your doctor, nurse
or community health worker.**

For more information about HIV/AIDS, read the other booklets in this series, contact the nursing station or health centre in your community, or try these:

Web sites

Health Canada

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/aids.htm

Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange

www.catie.ca

Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network

www.caan.ca

Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network

www.aidslaw.ca

Toll-free phone numbers

Help Line and AIDS Info Line (Western Arctic)

1 (800) 661-0844 or 920-2121 (Yellowknife)
from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m.

Nunavut AIDS information Line

1 (800) 661-0795 or 979-0520 (Iqaluit)
from 7 p.m. to midnight

Comité des personnes atteintes du virus d'immunodéficience humaine du Québec

1 (800) 927-2844 (Montreal)

Newfoundland and Labrador AIDS Committee

1 (800) 563-1575

