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San Diego Police Department

TRAINING BULLETIN

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ACQUISITIONS

ACQUIRED IMMUNE DEFICIENCY SYNDROME - AIDS

This Training Bulletin supersedes Training Bulletin 86-1.

PURPOSE

Health researchers agree that the current problem of AIDS has reached epidemic proportions. Top medical priority has been given to researching the disease that results in the diagnosis of fifty new cases each day in the United States alone. There are several factors that combine to make AIDS such a difficult problem. The primary problem is that the body of knowledge about AIDS is not sufficient. Medical researchers find that their knowledge about the disease changes on a daily basis.

The purpose of this bulletin is two fold. First, because of the nature of police work, it is important for our personnel to have as thorough an understanding as possible about how AIDS is transmitted. Secondly, we often find ourselves in the position of educators and current information will help us in this area.

INTRODUCTION

There is a great deal of concern about AIDS, since there is no known cure and the fatality rate is nearly 100 percent. Police officers are particularly concerned because some of the high-risk groups are frequently in contact with the criminal justice system: intravenous drug abusers, prostitutes, male street hustlers, transvestite prostitutes, and certain male homosexuals who engage in sexual activity with multiple partners.

Law enforcement personnel have a number of serious and legitimate questions about AIDS. For example: Who should they be careful with? How easy is it for them to contract AIDS in their line of work? How can they protect themselves if a person they encounter in a law enforcement contact is known to have AIDS?

This bulletin is designed to address these concerns, to provide accurate information, and to relieve officers of unnecessary fears, allowing them to do their jobs professionally and safely.

GENERAL FACTS ABOUT AIDS

AIDS is an acronym for ACQUIRED IMMUNE DEFICIENCY SYNDROME. This means that the disease is transmitted from person to person and results in impairment of the body's ability to fight disease and infection which results in illness and death.

AIDS is a blood borne disease that is NOT spread by causal contact such as touching, kissing, an exchange of saliva, or frisking suspects. The likelihood of a police officer contracting AIDS is remote, as few people are actually infected with the virus. Additionally, the virus is extremely fragile when outside the human body and is very difficult to transmit.

The identified virus is known as HTLV-(3). An individual may acquire the virus and harbor it in their system for up to 10 years before any symptoms appear. To date, about one percent of the identified cases in the U.S. have occurred in San Diego. There have been approximately 21,000 AIDS cases identified in the nation, but it is estimated that there are 500,000 to 1,000,000 asymptomatic individuals carrying the virus who are capable of infecting others. At this time, it is known that only a very small percent of those who are infected with the virus actually come down with the disease.

The virus is transmitted through semen (invasive sexual contact), vaginal secretions, and by blood products (e.g., from infected hypodermic needles, blood transfusions, plasma, and during the blood exchange between mother and fetus). The virus has been cultured in saliva, but it has been determined that AIDS cannot be transmitted through saliva. So far, the virus does not appear to be transmitted through urine or perspiration. Bloody fecal matter may contain the virus, however the virus is very fragile and can live outside the body for only a few seconds.

The AIDS virus does not kill. What kills are the diseases which the body is unable to protect itself against because the body's natural immune system is severely inhibited. (When disease or infection invade the body, our immunological system normally responds by producing "helper cells" to combat the invaders. The AIDS virus attacks and destroys these "helper cells.") This syndrome can result in the onslaught of many diseases. The two most common deadly diseases associated with AIDS are Kaposi's Sarcoma (KS) and Pneumocystis Carinii Pneumonia (PCP). KS is a rare form of skin cancer that causes pink, brown or purplish skin blotches. PCP is a parasitic infection of the lungs.

The diseases that develop in AIDS patients would not normally be a problem except for the immunological defects caused by the virus. Normal persons would not be affected, but for victims of the AIDS virus, the consequences are deadly. These opportunistic diseases include herpes, yeast infections, hepatitis, and intestinal infections.

Current research also suggests that AIDS victims suffer from neurological problems. Many victims develop a form of dementia not unlike Alzheimer's disease, affecting speech, movement and memory.

Frequent symptoms experienced by AIDS patients include extreme fatigue, loss of appetite, drenching night sweats, fever, diarrhea, swollen glands, persistent dry cough, white spots in the mouth, and purple blotches under the skin.

Individuals who have the highest risk of contracting AIDS belong to the following groups: homosexual and bisexual men who have many sex partners, sex partners of persons carrying the AIDS virus, present and past abusers of intravenous drugs, hemophiliacs and their sex partners, those who have sex with members of high risk groups, and fetuses of female AIDS virus carriers.

The U.S. Public Health Service has made the following recommendations to minimize the chances of contracting AIDS: avoid sexual relations with people in high risk groups; avoid having multiple sexual partners, and avoid having sex with those who do; use condoms; avoid substance abuse, particularly abuse that involves the use of hypodermic needles; and finally, maintain good physical health.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL

To date, no law enforcement officer has contracted AIDS. Equally encouraging is a recent study reported in the May 8, 1985 issue of CORRECTIONS DIGEST that found that hundreds of doctors, nurses, and others exposed to AIDS have not contracted the disease.

While AIDS is generally transmitted sexually, there are two potential sources of accidental contamination of concern to Police personnel. They are accidental needle punctures and treatment of injured persons. Fingernail scratches are also a potential problem if nails contain blood.

PROCEDURES

The most likely source of potential contamination is an accidental needle puncture. For this reason, needles should ALWAYS be treated as potentially infective and be handled with extraordinary care to prevent accidental punctures. Used needles present the greatest hazard and should be placed in puncture-resistant containers. Needles should NOT be re-capped, bent, broken, or manipulated by hand as this increases the potential for accidental puncture.

Avoid coming in contact with all body fluids of injured persons, especially blood, semen, and vaginal fluids. Because officers will not know who may be infected with the disease, treatment must be given which follows the guidelines below:

1. Wear disposable gloves when contact with blood or body fluids (semen or vaginal fluids) can be expected.

2. Use the Department-issued mouth-to-mask resuscitation device for mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, especially when there is blood in the mouth.
3. Always wash with soap and water after treating an injured person. ALCARE, an antiseptic foam, is excellent for immediate wash-up and is available at Area Stations and the Central Supply Room.

Special clothing, such as disposable gowns and face masks, are neither required nor recommended when transporting or handling known or suspected carriers of AIDS.

CONCLUSION

AIDS is a valid concern for law enforcement personnel. However, that concern should be tempered with accurate information and a rational assessment of the facts. To remain current on facts regarding the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, utilize the U.S. Public Health Services' toll free hot line with recorded information that is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. (800-342-AIDS).

AIDS research is continuing and as information becomes available, personnel will be advised of new developments.

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This bulletin was written with information compiled from Tony Marshall of the County Department of Health Services and Rick Cumming III, Safety Manager, City of San Diego. Their assistance is greatly appreciated.