

The HIV virus poses one of the biggest viral threats to human society today. It is contracted through bodily fluids such as blood and semen, and sometimes even saliva and tears. AIDS kills 100% of its victims and puts them through agony before they die. It has been a threat for about 15 years, and it is not going to stop now. In fact, AIDS is just getting started: It consumes more people each year. There is no known treatment for it either, only antibiotics to slow the reproduction of the virus.

HIV is passed from one person to another by bodily fluids only. It is usually gotten through sexual intercourse or other intimate contact, through the exchanging of unsterilized intravenous needles, or by the contact of HIV-infected bodily fluids and an open wound. It cannot permeate through intact skin, hence it cannot be spread through informal contact. AIDS has not been found to travel in insects or tame animals. In pregnant women, the virus only infects the infant near or at the time of birth. The virus dies quickly without a host.

AIDS (Acquired ImmunoDeficiency Syndrome) weakens the body's immune system so it is sensitive to infection. The AIDS virus primarily attacks the T lymphocytes, which are a main part of the immune system. The virus is also incubated in cells called macrophages, where it is accidentally sent to other, healthy cells in the body like neurons and lymphatic cells.

After HIV is contracted, the person looks and feels healthy for up to 20 years before symptoms start occurring. During this time, the person can give the virus to another even though it cannot be detected by sight or smell. Usually, symptoms start developing within 1 to 2 years. Typical indications of the virus are fever, weariness, weight loss, skin rashes, a fungal mouth infection called thrush, lack of immunity to infection, and enlarged lymph nodes.

When AIDS overtakes the body, the body becomes especially susceptible to tuberculosis, pneumonia, and a rare form of cancer called Kaposi's Sarcoma. Once AIDS has fully taken hold, the body may suffer damage to the nerves and brain. The life expectancy of an AIDS victim after the birth of symptoms is 1 to 5 years. AIDS was believed to have begun in Central Africa around 1979. Nearly all of the first AIDS patients were male homosexuals. However, after 1989 90% of all new cases of AIDS were from heterosexual intercourse. Public awareness rose as famous people began to die, like Rock Hudson, Perry Ellis, Michael Bennett, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Tony Richardson. Basketball star Magic Johnson also reported having AIDS. The approximate number of AIDS cases in the U.S. alone is 65,000 and growing.

So far, there is no treatment or vaccination for AIDS. With most viruses, the body produces antibodies that eventually destroy the virus. However, with HIV, natural antibodies are completely ineffective. Blood tests will not give accurate results of infection of HIV until between 2 weeks and 3 months after the initial infection. In 1987, the drug AZT (azidothymidine) had proved effective in slowing the growth of the virus, but it was lethal in large doses and some patients could not handle taking it at all. There was a new HIV-fighting chemical scientists found called DDI (dideoxyinosine) that was not as harmful to the patient and could be used in AZT's place for more sensitive patients. In 1992 DDC (zalcitabine) was found to be useful for delaying the reproduction of HIV in patients with advanced AIDS, but only in conjunction with AZT.

AIDS is one of an epidemic of super-deadly viruses like Ebola, Hanta Virus, and Dengue in Puerto Rico. In my opinion, this is nature's way of fighting back from overpopulation. However, AIDS is a formidable disease and is a force to be reckoned with.

