

7-12. THE MODERN-DAY PLAGUE: AIDS

Instructions: (1.) Read the text. (2.) Use the text to help you to answer the questions.

In the 1980s a new and deadly disease appeared, and the world suddenly became aware of the importance of the immune system. This disease is commonly referred to as AIDS. Since it is always fatal, it is sometimes called the "modern-day plague."

The term *AIDS* is an acronym (a word made of the first letters of several other words) for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. These words mean that AIDS is a collection of symptoms (syndrome) that result from a breakdown (deficiency) of the immune system; it is not something that you were born with, but something that you can acquire.

It is important for you to know that AIDS cannot be transmitted in most of the usual ways. It can be transmitted only by sexual contact, by sharing an unsterilized hypodermic needle with someone who has the disease, or by having infected blood somehow introduced into your bloodstream. It is a very serious disease, but you will not catch it by any kind of casual contact. It is, however, also important for you to know that a person who has been infected with the virus that causes AIDS may not have any symptoms for up to ten years. Unless he or she happens to be tested for AIDS during that time, the person will be unaware of the infection and may spread the disease to others. To protect yourself, you need to understand what the disease is and exactly how it may be spread.

The virus that causes this disease is called the "Human Immunodeficiency Virus," or HIV; it does its deadly work by weakening the immune system.

By destroying certain white blood cells, the HIV allows certain pathogenic microorganisms (which are usually kept at bay by white blood cells and antibodies) to take hold in the body. *Pneumocystis carinii*, for example, is a rare form of pneumonia that commonly infects persons whose immune system has been weakened by HIV. Kaposi's sarcoma, a cancer of the small blood vessels, is another example; once only rarely seen in elderly persons or in patients whose immune systems had been suppressed by certain drugs, it now appears frequently among victims of the HIV.

Level One Questions:

1. In the 1980s the world suddenly became aware of the importance of the _____

2. What do the letters *HIV* stand for?

3. What happens when the HIV weakens the immune system?

4. What is the name of the rare form of pneumonia that infects persons whose immune system has been weakened by the HIV?

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5. What is another disease that frequently appears among victims of the HIV?

6. Name the "modern-day plague" that is caused by the HIV.

7. What is important for you to know about AIDS?

Name _____ Date _____

7-15. HOW AIDS IS SPREAD

Instructions: (1.) Read the text. (2.) Use the text to help you to answer the questions and complete the chart.

Activity	Can spread AIDS	Cannot spread AIDS
1. Shaking hands		
2. Hugging		
3. Sneezing		
4. Eating in a restaurant		
5. Casual sex		
6. Using public restrooms		
7. Swimming		
8. Sharing hypodermic needles		

Many viruses are easily spread from person to person. The flu virus, for example, can be spread simply by a sneeze. If an infected person doesn't cover his or her mouth when he or she sneezes, small droplets can carry the virus through the air and can infect a healthy person. The virus that causes hepatitis—a virus that attacks liver cells—can be spread from a shared glass or an eating utensil.

The HIV, fortunately, isn't spread so easily, because it is unstable in air. It cannot be spread by shaking hands, hugging, or by any other forms of casual contact. You cannot catch AIDS in swimming pools, by eating in restaurants, or by using public restrooms. The two most common ways in which the HIV is transmitted are by having sex with an infected person and by sharing a hypodermic needle with another drug abuser.

Level One Questions:

1. Is it easy for the flu virus to spread from person to person? _____
2. Describe how the flu virus is spread.

3. What kind of cells does the hepatitis virus attack? _____
4. Is the hepatitis virus easily spread? _____
5. What is one way in which the hepatitis virus can be spread?

6. Can you catch AIDS by hugging someone or by shaking hands? _____

7-15. HOW AIDS IS SPREAD, continued

7. What are the two most common ways in which the HIV is transmitted?

Level Two Question:

8. Why is it not possible for the HIV to be transmitted through the air or by the sharing of eating utensils with an infected person?

Level Three Question:

9. The American Red Cross recommends that persons living with AIDS patients should not share razor blades and toothbrushes. It is safe, however, to share bar soaps and hand towels. Explain the difference.
