HIV/AIDS

Definition: Acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) is a progressive, incurable disease caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Aids destroys the CD4+ T cells, impairing the immune system and predisposing the individual to a number of opportunistic infections and cancers. HIV is transmitted through intimate sexual contact, use of contaminated needles, and exposure to HIV-tainted blood, body fluids that contain blood, and blood products. It also can be transmitted from mother to newborn.

CDC Classification of HIV Infection

- **Stage 1:** acute infection; a mononucleosis-like syndrome develops at the time of exposure.
- **Stage 2:** no symptoms are present, but the individual tests positive for HIV antibody.
- **Stage 3:** persistent, generalized lymphadenopathy appears; decrease in CD4T cells.
- Stage 4: HIV related diseases develop.

Risk Factors

- Homosexual/Bi-sexual men
- Heterosexuals engaging in high risk behavior (IV drug use; sharing needles/syringes; unprotected sex with multiple partners.)
- Infants born to infected women
- Infants and children who receive HIV-contaminated blood or blood products

Signs & Symptoms

- Infection may be "silent", often lasting for > 10 years
- Viral syndrome resembling mononucleosis or influenza within a few days of infection
- Persistent generalized swelling of lymph nodes
- Skin disorders (rash, dry scaly skin, seborrhea)
- More prone to infections (bacterial, fungal, viral, etc.)
- Malignancies (cancer can begin and spread to central nervous system, skin, mucous membranes, respiratory and gastrointestinal tracts)
- End stage symptoms may include unexpected weight loss, persistent fever, diarrhea, or night sweats

There are tests that can be performed to confirm HIV infection. There are drugs that can slow the progression or inactivate HIV. The treatment of the disease focuses on the type of infection or malignancy that the individual develops.

If you have been an IV drug user or have engaged in high risk behavior, discuss this with your counselor. A referral is available for free HIV testing upon request.

Feel free to address any questions you may have regarding HIV infection with your counselor or a member of the medical staff.

Hepatitis C

There are 5 different viruses which cause viral hepatitis. Hepatitis C virus (HCV) is known to account for the majority of what was previously referred to as non-A, non-B hepatitis. Individuals infected with HCV are often identified because they are found to have elevated liver enzymes on a routine blood test or because a hepatitis C antibody is found to be positive at the time of blood donation. It is estimated that 85% of people infected with the hepatitis C virus will develop chronic hepatitis.

Persons At HIGH Risk

- Those receiving blood transfusions
- IV drug users
- Healthcare workers
- Persons with multiple sex partner

The risk of post transfusion hepatitis C has been reduced over the last several years to <.5%. Also, the CDC states that the risk for exposure via sexual contact is rare for individuals having only one long- term sexual partner.

Possible Signs And Symptoms

- Low-grade fever
- Anorexia
- Nausea and vomiting
- Fatigue
- Muscle and joint pain
- Headache
- Cough
- Dark urine
- Clay colored stools

Treatment

It is possible to be treated with medication and relapse after medication is
discontinued. Chronic hepatitis C appears to be a slowly progressive disease which may advance over a period of 10-40 years. The disease may progress faster when acquired in middle age or older. Hepatitis C may be particularly severe when it occurs in the third trimester of pregnancy.

Hepatitis C can be treated with medication. Interferon, the primary drug used for treatment of hepatitis C has resulted in persons showing major improvement or normalization of liver tests. Patients sometimes relapse, requiring treatment with Interferon a second time.

If you have been diagnosed with Hepatitis C in the past, please report this to your counselor and the medical department at Private Clinic. If you have not been diagnosed with Hepatitis C, but are concerned due to being at high risk or having symptoms of the disease please feel free to discuss this with your counselor or a member of the medical staff at Private Clinic.

What Are Opiates?

Opioids are commonly prescribed because of their effective analgesic, or pain-relieving, properties. Medications that fall within this class—sometimes referred to as narcotics—include morphine, codeine, and related drugs. Morphine, for example, is often used before or after surgery to alleviate severe pain. Codeine, because it is less efficacious than morphine, is used for milder pain. Other examples of opioids that can be prescribed to alleviate pain include oxycodone (OxyContin), propoxyphene (Darvon), hydrocodone (Vicodin), and hydromorphone (Dilaudid), as well as meperidine (Demerol), which is used less often because of its side effects. In addition to their pain-relieving properties, some of these drugs—for example, codeine and diphenoxylate (Lomotil)—can be used to relieve coughs and diarrhea.

How do opioids affect the brain and body?

Opioids act by attaching to specific proteins called opioid receptors, which are found in the brain, spinal cord, and gastrointestinal tract. When these drugs attach to certain opioid receptors, they can block the transmission of pain messages to the brain. In addition, opioids can produce drowsiness, cause constipation, and, depending upon the amount of drug taken, depress respiration. Opioid drugs also can cause euphoria by affecting the brain regions that mediate what we perceive as pleasure.

What are the possible consequences of opioid use and abuse?

Chronic use of opioids can result in tolerance for the drugs, which means that users must take higher doses to achieve the same initial effects. Long-term use also can lead to physical dependence and addiction—the body adapts to the presence of the drug, and withdrawal symptoms occur if use is reduced or stopped. Symptoms of withdrawal include restlessness, muscle and bone pain, insomnia, diarrhea, vomiting, cold flashes with goose bumps ("cold turkey"), and involuntary leg movements. Finally, taking a large single dose of an opioid could cause severe respiratory depression that can lead to death. Many studies have shown, however, that properly managed medical use of opioid analgesic drugs is safe and rarely causes clinical addiction, defined as compulsive, often uncontrollable use of drugs. Taken exactly as prescribed, opioids can be used to manage pain effectively.

Is it safe to use opioid drugs with other medications?

Opioids are safe to use with other drugs only under a physician's supervision. Typically, they should not be used with other substances that depress the central nervous system, such as alcohol, antihistamines, barbiturates, benzodiazepines, or general anesthetics, as such a combination increases the risk of life-threatening respiratory depression.