

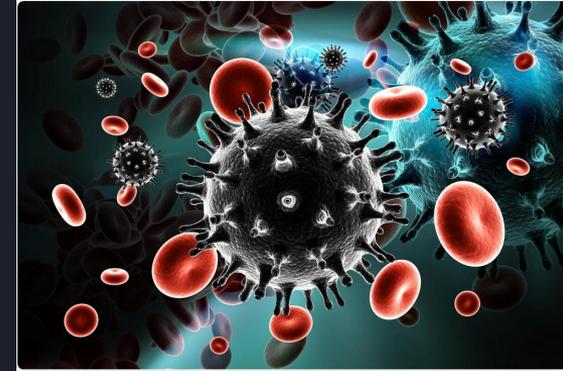


STDs and Mental Health

Events Committee

What is HIV/AIDS?

- HIV, or human immunodeficiency virus, is a virus that attacks the body's immune system and impairs its ability to fight diseases by eradicating disease-fighting cells like T cells and CD4 cells (white blood cells)
- HIV is commonly spread via contact with bodily fluids from an infected individual, mainly during unprotected sex. Another method of transmission is shared use of injection equipment like needles
- AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) is the last stage of HIV and arises when HIV is left untreated. People with AIDS have immune systems far weaker compared to earlier stages of HIV and are expected to survive for about 3 years without treatment
- There is no currently no cure for HIV/AIDS, however treatment is available and can greatly increase the lifespan of affected individuals, prevent the virus from progressing to later stages, and greatly reduce transmission



Forms of Stress that can contribute to Mental Health Issues in Individuals with HIV:

- Anxiety has been noted in 15.8% of HIV+ persons, compared with only 2.1% of the general population
- Access to healthcare and treatment can be a form of stress for individuals with HIV
- Shame and social stigma associated with HIV/AIDS
- Managing a complex medical treatment plan
- Experiencing loss similar to loss of a relationship or the loss of the life of a loved one
- Financial burden of treatment
- Unemployment or change in occupation



Substance Abuse in people with HIV/AIDS

- Substance abuse can lead to higher chance of developing HIV/AIDS and nearly 1/4th of people who test positive need help with treating their alcohol and drug use
- Drugs that use needles for injection- specifically heroin and meth- is a way the disease is easily transmitted between people
- People who use drugs and alcohol frequently are less likely to take ART, antiretroviral therapy as a means of treatment



Treatment of Mental Illness in people with HIV/AIDS

- Certain HIV medications also cause anxiety symptoms
- Some antiretroviral medications may cause symptoms of depression and sleep disturbance, and may make some mental health issues worse
- Complicated medication regimens and treatment plans can further contribute to stress.
- People can seek out psychologists, psychiatrists, or therapists to help them process their diagnosis and treatment as well as help with any mental illnesses, like depression or anxiety, that could arise from the stress of having this disease
- There are HIV support groups where one can meet in a safe and supportive environment and members and offer support to other people living with HIV

