

Let's Talk About: HIV/AIDS

Where we are at and how we can control it



ST. PAUL'S HOSPITAL
COMMUNITY FORUMS

What is HIV/AIDS?

HIV-the **Human Immunodeficiency Virus**-is a virus that attacks the immune system, resulting in a chronic, progressive illness that leaves people vulnerable to opportunistic infections and cancers. When the body can no longer fight infection, the disease is known as AIDS, which stands for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome. On average, it takes more than 10 years to progress from initial HIV infection to AIDS.

AIDS is a deadly disease that has already killed more than 25 million people around the world, according to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). There is no cure for AIDS, and currently no vaccine against HIV infection.

In order to be infected, the virus must enter a person's bloodstream (HIV cannot survive outside the body). HIV is transmitted from one person to another through:

- unprotected sexual intercourse (vaginal, anal or oral)
- shared needles or equipment for injecting drugs
- unsterilized needles for tattooing, skin piercing or acupuncture
- pregnancy, delivery and breast feeding (i.e., from an HIV-infected mother to her infant)
- occupational exposure in health care settings

Despite the fact that HIV infection is largely preventable, thousands of new infections occur each year and the number of persons living with HIV in Canada is rising. The Public Health Agency of Canada estimates that 58,000 people in Canada were living with HIV infection at the end of 2005-a 16 per cent increase from the 2002 estimate of 50,000. An estimated 27% of these individuals-or 15,800 people-were believed to be unaware of their infection and thus were not seeking

treatment and may have been unknowingly infecting others.

The above excerpt is taken from the Public Health Agency of Canada website at <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/aids-sida/info/index-eng.php>

HIV in BC

As of October 2009, 5037 persons were receiving antiretrovirals or other anti-HIV medications from the Drug Treatment Program at the B.C. Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS (BC-CfE). This is an increase of 467 persons from the same time last year.

What is the role of the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS?

The B.C. Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS is Canada's largest HIV/AIDS research and treatment facility and a key provincial resource, serving all health authorities, regions and citizens of BC. Founded in 1992 by St. Paul's Hospital and the provincial Ministry of Health, the BC-CfE strives to:

- improve the health of British Columbians with HIV through the development, ongoing monitoring, and dissemination of comprehensive research and treatment programs for HIV and related diseases;
- develop rational and cost-effective research and therapeutic protocols and programs for the treatment of HIV and related diseases;
- provide educational support programs to health care professionals; and
- monitor the impact of HIV/AIDS on British Columbia and conduct analyses of the effectiveness of programs for investigating and treating HIV and related diseases.

In B.C., all anti-HIV medications are distributed at no cost to eligible HIV-infected individuals through the BC-CfE's Drug Treatment Program. An estimated 11,000 British Columbians are HIV infected, with close to 450 new cases reported each year.

Join medical experts from Providence Health Care for monthly community forums at St. Paul's Hospital. Each month features a different health topic with time to pose questions to the experts.

The forums are free and take place the third Wednesday of every month.

7:00 – 9:00 pm
(doors open at 6:30)
New Lecture Theatre
St. Paul's Hospital
1081 Burrard Street

For more information and to register, please email ownyourhealth@providencehealth.bc.ca or call 604-806-8495. Light refreshments will be served.

www.phcmedicine.ca

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As well, more than 3,200 cases of AIDS have been reported in the province--a third of whom currently live with the disease.

Antiretroviral medication is prescribed according to specific guidelines generated by the BC-CfE's Therapeutic Guidelines Committee.

The BC-CfE Therapeutic Guidelines provide recommendations for the best practices for treating HIV disease. The guidelines are the basis of treatment strategies, the results of which are constantly monitored by studying clinical and virological outcomes of all treated HIV patients in the province. These outcome studies contribute to the findings, which then generate further revisions to the guidelines.

The BC-CfE works closely with health authorities to develop, monitor, implement and evaluate HIV/AIDS care plans.

Milestones

The BC-CfE has made a significant mark not only in B.C., but internationally. The numerous accomplishments include:

1986 John Ruedy Immunodeficiency Clinic (IDC) opens as a specialty clinic for HIV infected patients.

1992 The BC-CfE develops provincial HIV/AIDS Treatment Guidelines, reviewed and updated quarterly.

1996 B.C. becomes the first Canadian province to adopt triple drug therapy for all eligible patients in a publicly funded plan and immediately sees dramatically reduced HIV/AIDS related morbidity and mortality.

1996 BC-CfE research findings reveal an explosive outbreak of HIV and hepatitis C in injection drug users in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

1997 Multiple Drug Rescue Therapy is initially developed for patients failing conventional therapies.

1998 The BC-CfE first to use drug resistance monitoring in Canada.

2000 The BC-CfE first to use therapeutic drug monitoring of antiretroviral drugs for HIV infection in Canada.

2003 IDC expands as a comprehensive primary and specialty clinic for HIV-infected patients.

2003 The BC-CfE initiates the scientific evaluation of the first North American Supervised Injecting Facility in Vancouver Downtown Eastside. Since then the research team has generated over 30 peer-reviewed papers demonstrating the effectiveness of this approach.

2005 The BC-CfE pioneers the use of combination TMC114 and TMC125 as a life saving treatment option for patients who exhausted all conventional options of antiretroviral therapy.

2006 BC-CfE publishes a landmark paper on "The case for expanding access to highly active antiretroviral therapy to curb the growth of the epidemic" (Lancet 2006; 368: 531-36).

2008 BC-CfE's proposed expanded access to highly active antiretroviral therapy to curb the growth of the HIV epidemic is endorsed by former Special Envoy to UNAIDS Stephen Lewis, President Bill Clinton and the Economist.

2008 Dr. Montaner receives an inaugural Avant Garde award (\$2.5 million over 5 years) from the National Institute on Drug Abuse in the USA to support further development of the proposed expanded access to antiretroviral therapy to curb the growth of the HIV epidemic, also known as "STOP HIV/AIDS"

2009 Premier Gordon Campbell commits to support The STOP HIV/AIDS as a pilot project to expand access to HIV/AIDS drugs to the street-involved population in Vancouver's downtown eastside and Prince George.

St. Paul's Hospital is an acute care, teaching and research hospital located in downtown Vancouver. It is home to many world-class medical and surgical programs, including heart and lung services, HIV/AIDS and kidney care.

St. Paul's serves both the local community and patients from across BC and the Yukon. St. Paul's is one of 14 health care facilities in Vancouver operated by Providence Health Care, one of Canada's largest faith-based health care organizations. Providence's 1,000 physicians and 6,000 staff deliver compassionate care to patients and residents in British Columbia while training medical professionals and making innovative advances in research.

To support programs like this at St. Paul's, please visit www.helpstpauls.com

This evening's presentations and future presentations will be available to view on our website, thanks in part to the generous support of: