

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

AIDS

Third of Series

Massachusetts Department of Public Health, 150 Tremont Street, Boston, MA 02111, (617) 727-0049, Dr. Bailus Walker, Jr. Commissioner

Since Governor Michael S. Dukakis established the Statewide Task Force on AIDS in the summer of 1983, Massachusetts has been in the forefront of AIDS policy, research, educational, service and antibody testing efforts.

The Office of Health Resources and the Center for Laboratories and Communicable Disease Control have the primary responsibilities within the Department of Public Health of responding to growing policy and program issues related to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. A Statewide AIDS Coordinator was appointed in August 1985 as part of the recognition of these increasing responsibilities.

Ongoing Activities in Massachusetts

Policy Development

A number of AIDS-related policies have been developed and widely distributed. Based on the most up-to-date scientific and medical knowledge of the disease, these policies enable institutions, individual providers, and the public at large to respond responsibly and consistently to this public health concern.

Policies on the following subjects have been adopted by the Governor's Task Force on AIDS with approval from appropriate state and community agencies:

- Attendance of children with AIDS in school.
- Recommendations for caregivers of preschool-aged children diagnosed with AIDS or clinical infection with HTLV-III (AIDS) antibody.
- Recommendations for food industry personnel on AIDS.
- Residential treatment facility policy on AIDS.
- Clinical and hospital laboratory use of HTLV-III testing.
- Recommendations for dentists and dental professionals.
- Hospital policy for Department of Public Health hospitals.

Research Initiatives

Since July of 1984, the Commonwealth has been supporting Massachusetts scientists and clinicians researching the cause, care and treatment, and prevention of AIDS.

Research efforts have been targeted toward:

- Prevention through the development of a vaccine.
- Prevention of transmission through epidemiological studies to learn more about risk factors for transmission.
- Care and treatment of people with AIDS through effective drug therapies.
- Protection of the blood supply.
- Costs of inpatient and outpatient care.

For many researchers, state funds are their sole source of support for AIDS-related work. The Massachusetts Research Council, composed of specialists in virology, microbiology, immunology, epidemiology, infectious disease, and public health, reviews each contract annually. The determination of funding is based on the program and promise of the research.

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Educational Programming

With education the only way to prevent AIDS, the Department of Public Health has targeted informational campaigns to reach the general public, high-risk groups, health care workers, employers, school officials, and other concerned parties. The campaigns have been designed to increase understanding of the disease, teach the facts about transmission of the virus, implement the approved policies, and alleviate unnecessary fears.

Specific Department of Public Health efforts have included:

- Five regional Public Health Rounds held statewide to enable citizens to discuss AIDS with individuals who have expertise in the epidemiology, treatment, psychosocial, and legal aspects of AIDS.
- Production and distribution of an informational booklet for physicians and health care providers, fact sheets, and a monthly newsletter.
- Support for educational activities of the AIDS Action Committee (AAC) to reach high-risk individuals and inform them about ways to reduce the risk of exposure to the AIDS virus. The support extends to AAC's work with health care communities in sensitizing providers to the needs and concerns of patients with AIDS.
- State support for a toll-free, statewide hotline which averages 2,500 calls per month.
- In-service training and education to state agencies, local school committees, police, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, day care workers, local government officials, social service providers, and other affected groups and institutions which request or demonstrate a need for such training.

Services

Ensuring local access to health care and support services for people with AIDS in their community is a priority of the Commonwealth's AIDS program. Toward that end the Department has:

- Surveyed providers and patients and their advocates to identify issues affecting the provision of community health services for people with AIDS living at home. As a result, Community Health Resource Specialists have been hired for patient advocacy, documentation of gaps in community services, and in-service education.
- Initiated program development to train hospice volunteers in the western part of the state.
- Begun development of a Community Resource Directory for use by providers as well as by families and friends.

Alternative HTLV-III Testing Program

The Department also has established a program to provide access to the HTLV-III antibody testing by setting up alternative test sites. At these sites, individuals can anonymously have their HTLV-III antibody status determined in a supportive, informative, and confidential environment. Counseling is also provided as part of this program.

For More Information:

Massachusetts Department of Public Health

Toll-free, Statewide AIDS Hotline 1-800-235-2331

Office of Health Resources (617) 727-0368

Community Health Resource Specialists

Boston: (617) 437-6200

Western Mass.: (413) 586-7525

(413 Area Code Only) 1-800-445-1255

Alternative Test Site Program (617) 522-4090

AIDS Action Committee

(617) 536-7733 (Hotline)

(617) 437-6200 (Administration)

AIDS Hotline (City of Boston)

(617) 424-5916

Office of Public Information and Health Education (617) 727-0049

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