



Questions and Answers (HIV History)

Q. Where does HIV come from?

A. The origin of HIV is greatly debated; however, there are several ideas and theories on the source of this virus. The most common, and widely held, theory is that HIV is a virus that crossed the species barrier from simians to humans. Within this strain of thought it is believed that a similar virus found in monkeys, SIV, was transmitted to humans. The transmission of a virus from animals to humans is not uncommon in history; Ebola, bird-flu are examples. The SIV version of the virus is related to HIV leading researchers to connect the two. Within this theory the mechanism of how the virus moved from a monkey source to humans is unknown. There are ideas about someone cutting monkey-meat and also their hand, facilitating the transfer.

Q. I've heard of many other origins!

A. Yes, there are many other ideas. There was a book written arguing that HIV was transmitted to humans via the polio vaccinations in the Congo. Research to date seems not to support this theory, however none have yet to be proved. Other ideas believe that someone intentionally created HIV to kill others, or that it is a virus sent by extra-terrestrial beings. Although these theories are held by some, they are not supported by research. To this date the exact origin of HIV/AIDS remains unknown.

Q. Does it matter?

A. To an extent, it does matter. However, today we have other issues of greater importance. Whether HIV came from Mars or Monkeys the virus is here. Forty-million people are living with it today and twenty-five million have already died. What is vitally important is prevention of new infections, and treatment, care, and support of those living with HIV/AIDS. If we found the origin of HIV tomorrow it would not change the fact that people are living with and being infected with this virus.

Q. What is the history of HIV?

A. HIV was first tested in the 1980's in the USA, however HIV existed long before this first test. Looking back on blood samples available, the first positive blood sample found was from Central Africa during 1959. Other cases have been tracked back and found in Uganda, America, Haiti, and Tanzania in the 1970's. Research to date seems to suggest that HIV entered the human population around the 1930's or 1940's. In 1983 two researchers, one in France and one in America, both discovered HIV, the cause of AIDS.