HIV-positive visitor ? What are the risks? [1]

Alice,

A friend has HIV. Should I allow him to stay in our home, swim in our pool, bathe in our bathrooms, etc.? In other words, what are the dangers of transmission? I am especially concerned as I have small children. Thank you.

? Feeling Ignorant and Want to be Informed

Answer

Dear Feeling Ignorant and Want to be Informed,

First and foremost, seeking knowledge is a surefire way to feel less ignorant ? so kudos to you for asking for more information. Your concerns are understandable, especially when you're unsure about risks to your children. The good news is that casual contact (which includes activities such as swimming in the same pool or using the same bathroom [2]) is not a recognized method of transmitting HIV. Therefore, it appears you've got the green light for welcoming your friend to stay at your home.

So, if not through casual contact, how is HIV transmitted? HIV can be transmitted from one person to another by:

- Having certain bodily fluids (i.e., semen, vaginal/cervical fluid, blood, breast milk) from an infected person come in contact with mucous membranes (found in the vagina, rectum, urethra, and the mouth) or broken skin.
- Being exposed to infected blood through the use of contaminated needles.
- Passing the virus from an infected mother to baby during pregnancy, delivery, or through breastfeeding (the virus is present in breast milk).

Unless you or a member of your family are exposed in these ways, there just isn't evidence to suggest that simply having your pal come to visit and join you in every-day activities will pose a transmission risk. Moreover, not only does the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [3] report that there is NO scientific evidence that indicates HIV can be transmitted through casual contact, the virus isn't transmitted via air, saliva, sweat, insect bites, or water, either. For more detailed information on the confirmed modes of HIV transmission, check out Routes of HIV transmission? [4]

With this information in mind, the types of interaction you'll likely have with your pal (based on...
what you've mentioned in your question) pose no real risk to you and your family. Hopefully, this calms some of your concerns. Now that you know, though, perhaps it's time to start getting excited for an upcoming visit!

One more thing: there's lots to know about HIV. So, if you continue to be curious, you could make an appointment with a health promotion specialist to learn more about HIV and how to reduce your risk. You may be interested in checking out some Q&As in the HIV/AIDS category of the Go Ask Alice! Sexual and Reproductive Health archives.

Alice!
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