

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF  
**AIDS**

*A Social, Political, Cultural, and  
Scientific Record of the HIV Epidemic*

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ral treatment is required to treat their own HIV infection, because prior use of antiviral therapy could potentially increase the occurrence of drug resistance and thus make effective treatment difficult.

Another potential method for interruption of maternal transmission of HIV is infusion during pregnancy of high doses of anti-HIV antibody that could neutralize the virus. Maternal supplementation with vitamin A has also been proposed as a means of decreasing transmission, because it would strengthen the immune system of the mother. This type of approach would be especially appealing for use in less-developed nations, where access to antiviral medications is limited. Experimental protocols designed to investigate these approaches have been in progress. Cleansing the birth canal with virucidal agents has been attempted as a means of decreasing HIV transmission, although initial results of use of the virucide chlorhexidine were disappointing.

The potential role of cesarean sections as a means of reducing transmission remained controversial. As of the mid-1990s, cesarean section was not routinely recommended. It has been estimated that approximately 16 women would have to undergo cesarean section, with its own set of risks, in order to prevent one case of HIV transmission. The role of cesarean section for decreasing transmission has been the subject of a randomized clinical trial comparing vaginal deliveries and births by cesarean section.

None of the efforts to interrupt mother-to-infant transmission will succeed unless the availability and use of HIV testing for women of reproductive age are widespread. The present methods of interrupting transmission appear to be most effective when begun during the second trimester of pregnancy. Therefore, an important aspect of prenatal care is testing for HIV infection. The U.S. Public Health Service has recommended that all women of reproductive age be offered voluntary HIV testing. However, all forms of HIV testing, especially those that are mandatory, have remained politically controversial.

STEPHEN M. ARPADI

**Related Entries:** Antibodies; Babies; Blood; Children; Ethics, Personal; Testing Debates

**Key Words:** antiviral drugs, breast feeding, cesarean section, maternal transmission, transplacental infection, vitamin A

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## Media Activism

Media activism involves the creative works of activists, educators, and artists who use print, television, film, radio, or computers to describe, record, interpret, or contest the meanings of AIDS.

The AIDS activist movement is sometimes described as the first "postmodern" social movement because of the importance placed upon representation in nearly all aspects of its struggle. Since as early as 1981, when the gay press began limited reporting on the medicine of "gay cancer," AIDS activists have made use of the media to further their community's goals and to address its needs. For instance, since its inception, Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) in New York has produced pamphlets, comic books, advertisements, cable shows, and educational videotapes. Regional and local chapters of the grassroots organization ACT UP have facilitated the production by media groups, video units, and even small community service agencies of educational materials about AIDS issues in their own communities.

AIDS organizations have used the media in at least four ways. First, organizations have created their own representations of the crisis, which reflect an "insider" urgency and fluency. Second, they have broadened the depth and scope of the mainstream media's limited and often biased representation of the crisis. Third, they have countered the misinformation about AIDS sometimes created by the mainstream media. Finally, they have produced creative and critical representations of the experiences and beliefs of people with HIV/AIDS.

The history of AIDS in the popular mind depends greatly on how it has been represented on television and film, in newspapers and magazines, in scientific writing and the arts, and even on the Internet. AIDS media activism is founded upon a belief that the most complex responses must be connected to the realm of representation, which includes such issues as how and in what forms a society knows about AIDS and who has the power to inform. The work of media activists has taken many forms: videotapes that document the work of one AIDS



The first newsmagazine published by people with AIDS (PWAs) in the United States was *Newsline*, a monthly publication of the People with AIDS Coalition of New York (PWACNY). Media activism has taken print, videotaped, audiotaped, online, and many other forms.

activist (*Mildred Pearson*, The Brooklyn AIDS Task Force, 1988), magazines and newsletters by and for people with AIDS (*Positive*, *The PWA Healthline*), cable talk shows about experimental drug therapies (*Medical Update*, GMHC's *Living With AIDS Show*), documents of AIDS demonstrations (*Voices from the Front*, Testing the Limits Collective, 1992), independent feature films about women of color and HIV (*The Heart of the Matter*, Gini Retticker and Amber Hollibaugh, 1993), and public television news magazines for and/or about HIV-positive people (*AIDS Quarterly*, PBS; *HIV Weekly*, AIDS Films).

Any and all of this work can be considered activism if it responds to dominant understandings of AIDS with new meanings or points of view that reflect the many and complex experiences and beliefs of people with HIV/AIDS. Often also called alternative media, this work does what mainstream media cannot: it speaks to a small audience about a specialized topic, often from an explicit position at low costs and without the motivation of payment.

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ

Related Entries: Artists and Entertainers; Arts Community; Dance and Performance Art; Film; Literature; Music;

Pornography; Radio; Symbols; Television Programming; Theater; Visual Arts; World AIDS Day; Writers

Key Words: activism, alternative media, film, publishing, representation, video

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