

HHS NEWS

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National Institutes of Health
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The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) today announced a three-year, \$1.7 million contract with the New York Blood Center and Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York City to help in research on acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS).

AIDS, a recently recognized condition of unknown cause, is a severe suppression of the body's immune system leading to disorders that include Kaposi's sarcoma, a rare tumor of the blood vessel walls, and opportunistic infections such as Pneumocystis pneumonia. AIDS occurs primarily among homosexual men, intravenous drug abusers, recent Haitian immigrants, and hemophiliacs. As of July 11, 1831 cases have been reported, with 684 deaths. In no patient has the immune suppression been reversed.

Many specimens have been collected from patients who have already been diagnosed as having AIDS. However, scientists recognize that the disease probably is transmitted to patients many months before the signs of AIDS appear. This new contract is specifically designed to collect specimens during the time of exposure and transmission of AIDS.

The Blood Center and the Cancer Center will provide NIAID with specimens from 325 male homosexuals, the group at greatest risk of developing AIDS. Investigators will use these specimens to try to find the infectious agent or agents that may be responsible for AIDS. They will also look for any changes in specific blood cells that may be predictive of the disease.

Three groups of volunteers will be recruited. One group will include individuals with generalized swollen lymph nodes, persistent

weight loss, and persistent fever. These symptoms may be very early signs of AIDS.

The second group will consist of healthy homosexual males who regularly donated plasma and serum samples to the New York Blood Center in the past. Many of these samples are in storage and can also be used in the study.

In the third group will be male homosexuals considered to be at low risk because they live in an area where AIDS is uncommon.

At the beginning of the study, each volunteer will be evaluated according the risk factors for AIDS, such as types of sexual practices and numbers of different sex partners. Approximately 14,000 specimens will be collected each year, including samples of blood (serum, plasma, and leukocytes), semen, feces, saliva, and urine. The individuals will be examined regularly for clinical and immunological abnormalities and for other signs of the development of AIDS.