

PRIME MINISTER

AIDS

Mr. Fowler's office tells me that the minute below follows a long meeting this morning between Mr. Fowler, Mr. Hayhoe, Baroness Trumpington, Ken Stowe and the Chief Medical Officer, at which they concluded, after much agonising that the proposed advertisement would lose much of its effect if the passage of "risky sex" was omitted. Mr. Fowler has therefore proposed some (quite small) amendments, which I have marked up on the original draft in the H Committee paper below. Mr. Fowler wants the advertisement to appear in the newspapers next weekend for which space has already been booked.

Are you content with the draft advertisement, as amended?

N.L.W.

Yes -

Trumpington

mb

(N. L. WICKS)

10 March 1986



PRIME MINISTER

AIDS

I have seen your Private Secretary's letter of 6 March setting out your continuing reservations about the proposed AIDS advertisements.

I recognise that some of the material in the proposed advertisements might shock some people. Indeed, the Chief Medical Officers' introduction admits as much. But the advertisements are intended to deal with a grave and unprecedented problem involving a potentially lethal infection which is already spreading outside the original high risk groups to women and children. Given that there is no vaccine and no cure the only option open is public education.

Because the problem is urgent I have been pressing ahead with the arrangements for putting the first advertisements into the Sunday Press on 16 March. I have done so with the unanimous support of H Committee, both as to the urgency and as to the use of explicit references to sexual practices which, the Committee agreed, are a regrettable necessity. This is a conclusion which other countries have had to face. I am enclosing a copy of an advertisement from the New Zealand Government which appeared in their press in August 1985. You will see that it is more explicit than the language H accepted.

But I have considered, in the light of your anxieties, how our advertisements might be modified. I have to say that our room for manoeuvre is small. For example, unless there is a reference to anal intercourse, which has been linked with 85 per cent of AIDS cases so far, the advertisement would lose all its medical authority and credibility. Not only should we be criticised for dodging the issue, but it is certain that the media would start to ferret out what the advertisements had lost along the way and why. No one is

E.R.

condoning these practices - quite the contrary; but they exist and are one of the ways by which AIDS spreads. Unless they are checked - through knowledge of their consequences - the spread into the population at large will accelerate.

Having said that, I have two suggestions to offer about that part of the advertisements which refers to risky sex. First, we could substitute for the sentence about anal intercourse the following - "Rectal sex involves the highest risk and should be avoided." Second, we could delete the word "Obviously" from the next sentence, to make the message more clinical.

These are changes in style only, I know, but 'H' Committee saw no scope for avoiding the concepts with which the sentence in question must deal. We cannot now decline to advertise, nor do so in terms which would fail to convey the essential message about this serious disease. To do so would be to jeopardise the public health unnecessarily, and there would be many who would bring that charge home. I shall, of course, insist that after the first two advertisements there should be a pause for proper evaluation of their effects.

But subject to the suggestions I have made, which I hope you find helpful, I see no alternative to proceeding with publication this coming weekend.

I am copying this minute to Willie Whitelaw, Nicholas Edwards, Tom King and Malcolm Rifkind.



N F

w March 1986

AIDS

HOW TO KEEP YOURSELF SAFE

We realise that some people will find some of the details in this article offensive. However, it was considered necessary to include this information in the interests of public health.

By now you will have heard a lot about AIDS on radio or TV, in newspapers and magazines. You probably know the basic facts about AIDS:

- It is a very serious disease.
- It is caused by a virus which can be passed on from one person to another.
- There is at present no cure.
- There is at present no vaccine to immunise people against it.
- Thousands of people throughout the world have already died from it.

But there may still be some things that you are confused about. This article gives you the most reliable and up-to-date information about AIDS. There is still a great deal that we do not yet know. But we do know enough to give you sensible guidelines for protecting yourself and others from AIDS.

Please read this information. It could save your life.

YOU ARE RIGHT TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT AIDS

AIDS can be spread from one person to another. Anyone, not just homosexual men, can get it. People who seem perfectly healthy can spread it. So you are right to be concerned.

It is important to remember that AIDS is spread only in certain limited ways. It is now much clearer what these are.

AIDS IS NOT SPREAD BY DAY-TO-DAY CONTACT WITH OTHER PEOPLE

You cannot get AIDS from just being near someone who has it.

When people have AIDS, the virus which causes it is found in their blood and semen. To become infected yourself, this blood or semen has to get into your body — not just on the skin, but into your bloodstream through an open cut, sore, graze, or other break in the skin. This will not happen through ordinary day-to-day contact with other people.

- It is still as safe as it ever was to meet and talk with other people, hug them, shake hands with them, be with them at work or school.
- There is no evidence that AIDS can be spread by talking to people, social kissing, sharing cups and glasses, and so on.

It is true that the AIDS virus has been found in small quantities in saliva. But it is only possible for it to be spread through very close contact with someone else's saliva — as in sexual (wet) kissing.

YOU CANNOT GET AIDS FROM THINGS TOUCHED BY A PERSON WHO HAS AIDS

The AIDS virus lives only a short time outside the human body.

No-one has ever caught AIDS from toilet seats, door knobs, second-hand clothes, or badly-washed cups, forks, spoons, or other such things. It is still as safe as it ever was to use public toilets, eat in restaurants, and so on.

BLOOD TRANSFUSIONS ARE SAFE

All blood given by blood donors in New Zealand is tested for AIDS. The risk of getting AIDS from a blood transfusion is now very remote.

Remember, you will only be offered a blood transfusion if it is really necessary. The risk to your life from not having the transfusion would be much greater than any risk of getting AIDS from the blood. **DONATING BLOOD IS NOT AND NEVER HAS BEEN DANGEROUS.**

AIDS CAN BE SPREAD IN TWO MAIN WAYS

■ **Through sexual contact.**
The AIDS virus is carried in the blood and semen of a person who has the infectious disease. It can be spread when these fluids come into direct contact with the bloodstream of a healthy person, for example, through an open cut, sore, or graze. This can happen during sex.

■ **If infected blood gets directly into a person's bloodstream.**
This can happen when drug addicts who inject drugs share needles or syringes. Blood from one person is passed on to another in the needle or syringe.

There may be other times when a person could come into direct contact with another person's blood, and it could get into his or her bloodstream. These situations are rare and the risk is very small.

LOW YOUR RISK

Most New Zealanders are not drug addicts who inject drugs. So for most of us, the only chance of coming in contact with the AIDS virus is through sexual contact.

You have almost no risk of coming in contact with the AIDS virus if you:

- Have no sexual partners.
- Are in a stable relationship and both you and your partner are completely faithful.

If you are not in either of these groups, you may have some risk of coming in contact with the AIDS virus and should read and follow the guidelines in the next section.

HOW YOU CAN AVOID AIDS

AIDS is not easy to catch. But it can be spread by people who seem perfectly healthy. It is up to you to make sure you do not put yourself at risk.

Safer Sex

- You are safest if you are in a stable relationship and both you and your partner do not have sex with anyone else.
- If you have one partner, you share his or her risks. Talk it over.
- Sex with more than one partner puts you at risk — and endangers others. The fewer sexual partners you have the less risk there is. It's as simple as that.
- Casual sex is always a risk — get to know your partner.
- Having sex with a prostitute, bisexual or homosexual man, or a drug addict who injects drugs can be especially risky. AIDS is more common among these groups.
- Use a condom — this will reduce the risk of getting AIDS and other diseases.
- Wet kissing may be risky.
- Semen in the mouth is risky.
- Anal intercourse is very risky for men and women and should be avoided.

Pamphlets explaining in more detail the risk involved in different sexual practices are available. (See the "More Information" section).

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **LEARN ABOUT AIDS.** Reading this is a good first step. If you have any questions or want to learn more see the "More Information" section.
- **BE AWARE OF THE RISKS** as outlined on this page. Use common sense. Be safe: when in doubt, don't.
- **AVOID RISKY SITUATIONS.** This may mean changing your way of life, which may not be easy. On the other hand getting AIDS will certainly change your life.
- **TALK ABOUT AIDS.** The more people that are aware of the problem, the more chance there is of controlling AIDS. Fear, secrecy and blame do not help. Remember, the problem of AIDS affects everyone. It is something everyone should know about.

- **BE RESPONSIBLE.** Preventing AIDS is very much up to you. Don't put yourself at risk. If you think there is a serious possibility that you have been exposed to AIDS, don't ignore it. Seek medical advice.
- **ABOVE ALL, DON'T PANIC.** Concern is helpful, senseless worry isn't.

MORE INFORMATION

- If you want to know more about AIDS
- If you are worried you may have AIDS
- ring the AIDS hotline: Auckland (09) 395-560. All calls are free and confidential — you will not have to give your name.
- write in confidence to the NZ AIDS Foundation, P.O. Box 6663, Wellesley Street, Auckland 1.
- contact your nearest district office of the Department of Health.
- contact the nearest VD (sexually transmitted disease) clinic.
- talk to your doctor.

Leaflets giving greater detail about AIDS and safer sex practices are freely available.

FOR PARENTS

Children in New Zealand are not likely to get AIDS.

The main way that children might become infected is by being born to a mother already infected.

Experience from overseas shows that children are not at risk of catching AIDS from other children by normal person to person contact as might occur at school.

If your children ask about AIDS, remember everyone needs to understand this disease; discuss it with them.

You will be the best judge of your child's maturity. For little ones a simple direct answer — AIDS is a disease that can kill people — plus plenty of reassurance is all that is needed.

As children approach adolescence, they may start to experiment with sex. They need to know the dangers they face and how to avoid getting AIDS. If you find it hard to talk to your children about these things ask your doctor or the school nurse for help, or see the "More Information" section. You could save your children's lives.


Dr. R.A. Barber
DIRECTOR GENERAL OF HEALTH

NAT. HEALTH AIDS: Aug. 1985

