

## AIDS

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To date no cases of AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) have been reported in Bahrain. With reported cases doubling every six months in the U.S.A. and Europe and a significant number of cases reported from the Arabian Gulf area where blood has been bought from other countries, how long can it be before this highly infectious virus, the identity of which is still not entirely known, reaches every country in the world?

A blood bank is an essential part of every medical establishment and in Bahrain the supply of blood from donors is almost entirely localised. The finger of blame for the wild fire spread of AIDS in the U.S.A. and Europe has been pointed at the international blood trade.

AIDS was first clinically diagnosed in the U.S.A. in 1981 but recent studies have revealed that the disease has been present in Central Africa since the early 1970's. The plasma centres in Zaire and Haiti are the focus of the AIDS epidemic. Certain companies in the U.S.A. rely on the supply of plasma from poor countries such as these where the AIDS virus is endemic. Reports have shown that a great number of perfectly healthy Central Africans have an antibody response to the AIDS virus which therefore, indicates that the disease is not new to this area. It has been suggested that the AIDS agent may exist in stable equilibrium within its rural African environment but in a new population it is altered by various factors including different innate susceptibility.

Originally treated as a sexually transmitted disease among homosexuals reports now indicate that this virus, now sweeping through certain high-risk groups all over the world, has many other contributory factors such as malnutrition, viral and parasitic infections and in particular areas a genetic predisposition towards the disease. The incubation period of the disease could be as long as up to ten years although in infants and pregnant women it is thought to be considerably shorter as both groups are immunologically susceptible.

The disease is being monitored carefully and virological work is becoming the equivalent to that of the Hepatitis B virus in the last decade.

It is now each country's aim to stop the spread of this virus to their shores. As an island with a relatively small population Bahrain has a great advantage. Continuous and careful monitoring of blood donors is essential and everything possible is being done to stop the spread of this often fatal disease.