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HIV Transmitted by Bite

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Health officials recently reported a case of a 91-year-old man in Florida who became infected with HIV following a bite on his hand from a prostitute. The man was bitten on his hand, arm, and leg while fighting with the prostitute during a robbery last year.

Although there is only one other case report of HIV being transmitted from a bite, health officials from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) do not believe this case represents a new route of transmission, but rather transmission almost certainly occurred through blood-to-blood contact. During the robbery, the prostitute, whose gums were bleeding, tore skin from her client's hand and bled into the wound.

Serologic testing showed that the man was not infected with HIV when treated after the fight, but did become infected several weeks later. Research laboratory testing of the viruses showed a close genetic relationship "consistent with person-to-person transmission," according to Florida health officials investigating the case.

The CDC said that there was no reason to change current recommendations about bites from people with HIV, particularly children; bites rarely involved blood or breaking skin. The CDC recommends that the education and care of children with HIV should be made on a case-by-case basis and should take into consideration the child's behavior, neurological development, physical condition, and the way they could be expected to interact with other children in a particular setting.

More than 476,000 cases of AIDS have been reported in the United States as of June 30, 1995. Only one other case report involved transmission from a bite. Health officials investigating this case said that if bites and saliva were important in the transmission of HIV, many more cases attributable to such factors would have been identified among the cases.

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