Spit Does Not Transmit

Fact Sheet for Law Enforcement Professionals on the Risk of HIV Transmission in the Line of Duty

A substantial percentage of HIV-specific criminal charges arise from incidents involving spitting and biting, and the majority of these incidents involve law enforcement personnel. There are no known cases of a law enforcement officer getting infected with HIV in the line of duty through these kinds of events. That is because this type of contact with an HIV positive person poses little or no risk of HIV transmission. Nonetheless, spit and bite incidents have resulted in new or enhanced criminal charges that alleged HIV exposure or transmission risks. This fact sheet provides current, scientifically sound information about the actual transmission risks that law enforcement professionals may face in the line of duty.

TRANSMISSION OF HIV

1. Contact with saliva, tears, or sweat has never been shown to result in HIV transmission.¹
2. Biting is not an established route of HIV transmission. There are numerous reports of bites that did not result in HIV infection. Bites that do not involve broken skin have no risk for HIV transmission, as intact skin acts as a barrier to HIV transmission.²
3. Being spit on cannot transmit HIV. Contact with saliva alone has never been shown to result in HIV transmission, and there is no documented case of transmission from an HIV-infected person spitting on another person.³
4. HIV is not transmitted through casual contact or through the food supply. As an expert in a recent federal case stated, a person would have to drink a 55-gallon drum of saliva in order to have a theoretically possible risk of transmission.⁴
5. Getting scratched by a person with HIV will not cause transmission.⁵ There has never been a case of HIV transmission following a fight, boxing, karate, or similar form of contact.
6. There are no documented cases of HIV transmission caused by contact with vomit, urine, or feces.⁶
ENDNOTES


