HIV/AIDS Timeline

1884-1924 During this period, scientists now believe that HIV spread from monkeys to humans through hunting practices in West Central Africa, near Kinshasa. The virus spread as colonial cities in Africa sprouted, and travel between cities grew; deaths from the virus were attributed to other causes.

1959 A man in the Democratic Republic of Congo died in what researchers now say was the first proven AIDS death.

1981 On June 5th, the CDC reports an unusual outbreak of Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia, a pneumonia never seen in people with intact immune systems, in five gay men in the US. In July, the New York Times reports the appearance of a rare cancer, Kaposi’s sarcoma, among 41 gay men in New York and California. As reports of unusual illnesses and deaths in gay men, intravenous drug users, and Haitians continue, the CDC declares the new disease an epidemic.

1982 The CDC links the new disease to blood and officially names it AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

1983 Institut Pasteur in France discovers the virus that leads to AIDS (the virus will later be called the Human Immunodeficiency Virus). The CDC documents the transmission of HIV from heterosexual sex, and the American Red Cross warns high-risk donors not to donate blood.

1984 The different modes of HIV transmission are identified. Genetic variations of the HIV virus are found, which complicates vaccine development.

1985 The first International Conference on AIDS is held in Atlanta and the CDC issues a warning to heterosexuals about the risk of contracting AIDS. Ryan White, a 13-year-old hemophiliac who contracted HIV from blood products, is barred from attending school. An HIV antibody test is approved, and blood banks begin screening donated blood. Public interest in the epidemic skyrockets with the news that movie idol Rock Hudson is infected. AIDS cases have now been reported in every populated continent in the world.

1986 U.S. Surgeon General Everett Koop publishes a report on AIDS, urging sex education and condom use for prevention. The first panel of the AIDS quilt is created in San Francisco.

1987 AZT becomes the first anti-retroviral drug approved by the FDA, priced at $12,000 a year, making it the most expensive drug in history. The American Medical Association rules that doctors are obligated to provide treatment for people with HIV/AIDS. The United States shuts its doors to HIV-infected immigrants and travelers. Ronald Reagan delivers his first-ever speech about AIDS. Larry Kramer
founds ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) in New York to advocate for AIDS issues.

**1988** December 1st is designated World AIDS Day by the World Health Organization. First comprehensive needle exchange program is created in Tacoma, Washington. The epidemic begins to spread at an alarmingly disproportionate rate among women and people of color.

**1989** After two years of protests led by ACT UP, the price of AZT is lowered by 20 percent.

**1990** Hemophiliac and AIDS activist Ryan White dies of the disease at age 18. Ronald Reagan apologizes for his neglect of the epidemic during his presidency. The Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination against people with HIV.

**1991** Ten years after the first reports, the World Health Organization says 10 million people worldwide carry the AIDS virus. In November, basketball superstar Earvin "Magic" Johnson announces that he is one of them.

**1993** The "female condom" is approved. The CDC expands the definition of AIDS to include new conditions under criticism that women and other groups are being discounted, and the number of AIDS cases doubles. AIDS is the leading cause of death for young adults in 64 U.S. cities.

**1994** An HIV treatment (AZT monotherapy) is approved for use in pregnant women to reduce the risk of mother-to-newborn transmission. The polyurethane condom for men appears on the market.

**1995** AIDS becomes the leading cause of death for Americans ages 25 through 44. The first of a new class of HIV drugs, called protease inhibitors, is approved.

**1996** With the use of protease inhibitors in combination with other drugs (the "AIDS cocktail"), surprisingly positive results will ignite a wave of optimism among AIDS patients and doctors. The AIDS quilt covers the entire National Mall in Washington, DC.

**1997** AIDS deaths drop 19% in the United States. The number of HIV-positive people worldwide is estimated at 22,000,000 (greater than the entire population of Australia!). The first standardization of HIV transmission prevention guidelines is published by the CDC.

**1998** A 47% drop in AIDS deaths since 1996 is reported. President Clinton declares HIV/AIDS in racial and ethnic minorities to be a severe and ongoing crisis. The Minority AIDS Initiative is created after African American leaders declare a
“state of emergency.” Scientists run the first large scale trials to test an HIV vaccine (something which is still not available in 2009).

**2000** 13th International AIDS Conference takes place in Durban, South Africa, under the slogan “Breaking the Silence.” Up to 25% of sub-Saharan Africans are infected by HIV, and only 1% of the sub-Saharan Africans who need antiretroviral therapy are receiving it. The FDA approves several more drugs to combat HIV and AIDS.

**2002** The South African version of "Sesame Street" introduces a character to help educate children about AIDS. UNAIDS reports that women comprise about half of all adults living with HIV/AIDS worldwide.

**2003** The U.S. government approves a $15 billion measure to fight HIV/AIDS around the world. Called the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the funds will be spread across five years and will go to sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean.

**2004** The 15th International AIDS Conference is held in Bangkok in July. Federal regulators approve OraQuick, the first rapid test for HIV-1 and HIV-2 that can be used on oral fluid.


**2007** HIV antiretroviral treatment is shown to extend the life expectancy of those who are infected by 24 years.

**2008** The CDC revises its estimate of annual new infections in the United States from 40,000 per year to 56,000 per year, highlighting the need for better prevention programs and expanded testing for all adults. The epidemic continues to disproportionately affect minorities, especially young black men. Luc Montagnier and Francois Barre-Sinoussi are awarded the Nobel Prize in medicine for their discovery of the HIV virus.

**2009** AIDS has killed more than 25 million people worldwide since 1981. 1.1 millions Americans are among the 33 million people living with HIV/AIDS. There is treatment, but no cure and no vaccine.