About Steve-O Snorting Cocaine Tainted With HIV-Positive Blood...

Was the *Jackass* star at risk of contracting HIV? Plus: the other link between HIV and cocaine.

January 18, 2019 By Trent Straube

Steve-O has pulled another stunt: He got folks talking about HIV this week (though not necessarily in a productive way). The daredevil from MTV's early 2000 hit Jackass recently did an interview on In Depth With Graham Bensinger. (You can watch a video clip above.) In the segment, Steve-O talks about snorting cocaine tainted with the blood of someone living with HIV.

This was back when Steve-O was a drug user. His dealer was HIV positive and an injection drug user. One time, Steve-O stopped by to pick up drugs and found the guy passed out; next to him on a table was some cocaine that had been splattered with blood. Steve-O snorted "the tainted blood cocaine."

Steve-O then explains in the interview that he has been tested for HIV numerous times and knows he doesn't have the virus. At the end of the segment, he also mentions that "fortunately, when the blood dries, the AIDS doesn't live for very long," meaning he wasn't at high risk to begin with. Of course, most media and headlines ignore this element of the interview and instead highlight the click-bait scary stuff. But was Steve-O's risk assessment correct?

Hard to believe it's been an entire decade since I've had a drink or a drug. I just can't put into words how grateful I am for @realjknoxville and the rest of the guys who locked me up in a psychiatric ward on March 9, 2008, where this journey began. Thank you, dudes, I love you. pic.twitter.com/10dUWO5ViZ

— Steve-O (@steveo) March 10, 2018

Let's review some basics. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, HIV is a fragile virus when outside the human body and doesn't cause infection in that condition. That's why you can't get HIV from toilet seats, spit, tears, sweat, eating utensils, mosquitoes or hugs. In fact, the only modes of transmission include:

- Blood
- Semen
- Pre-cum
- Rectal fluids
- Vaginal fluids
- Breast milk

But the cocaine Steve-O snorted contained droplets of blood from someone living with HIV. What is that transmission risk? "HIV may survive in dried blood at room temperature for up to five or six days provided that the optimum pH level is maintained," writes aidsmap about laboratory-based research examining such transmission. Whether this virus could be infectious depends on a number of factors such as temperature, amount of virus, quantity of blood, humidity and exposure to sunlight.

In fact, aidsmap mentions a 2003 review from Australia that looked at transmission risk from syringes discarded by people who inject drugs; it concluded that the virus could survive several weeks in blood in a syringe—though that doesn't mean the virus was capable of causing an infection. In fact, there were no reports of HIV transmitted via these discarded syringes.

"It is important to bear in mind that whilst HIV may live for some time outside the body," aidsmap writes, "HIV transmission has not been reported as a consequence of contact with spillages of blood, semen or other body fluids."

The bigger HIV transmission risk regarding cocaine concerns injection of the drug. Another potential risk is the increased likelihood of having unprotected sex while high or as a way to obtain the drug. (Perhaps it's also worth noting that in the case of Steve-O, we don't know whether the HIV-positive person was taking antiretrovirals and maintaining an undetectable viral load.)

It's also worth pointing out that cocaine poses a different type of HIV-related health risk. For people living with the virus, frequent cocaine use can accelerate viral replication, the onset of the disease and neurological conditions associated with having HIV.

Here’s one thing that Steve-O did not mention but should be part of these conversations: hepatitis C. That’s because hep C can be transmitted by sharing items such as a straw or rolled bill to snort drugs.

Steve-O’s story has a happy ending. Last March, he celebrated 10 years of sober living. He also got married and is currently on The Bucket-List Tour across the country.

To learn more about HIV and cocaine risk, click #Cocaine. To learn more about how HIV is (and is not) spread, read the POZ Basics titled “HIV Transmission and Risks.” To learn more about hepatitis, including hep C, visit our sister publication HepMag.com and its Basics page.

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