

Inmates face high AIDS risk: group

*5 per cent of Quebec prisoners have HIV, study says
Provincial officials say they are working on a program*

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A group of AIDS activists say the provincial government isn't doing enough to fight AIDS in prisons.

"If you are sent to a prison in Quebec right now, you may as well be sentenced to death," said Doug Buckley of ACT UP Montreal. "There is no way of preventing the spread of HIV infection in prisons."

Members of ACT UP staged a mock hanging in front of the office of the Quebec AIDS Coordination Centre yesterday to symbolize what the group says is a growing problem.

Buckley said about 5 per cent of the roughly 3,400 inmates in provincial jails are HIV positive, the virus linked to AIDS. That figure is based on a 1989 study of two provincial jails by Dr. Catherine Hankins of the Montreal General Hospital.

"There are no condoms in provincial jails and no education about AIDS," said Buckley.

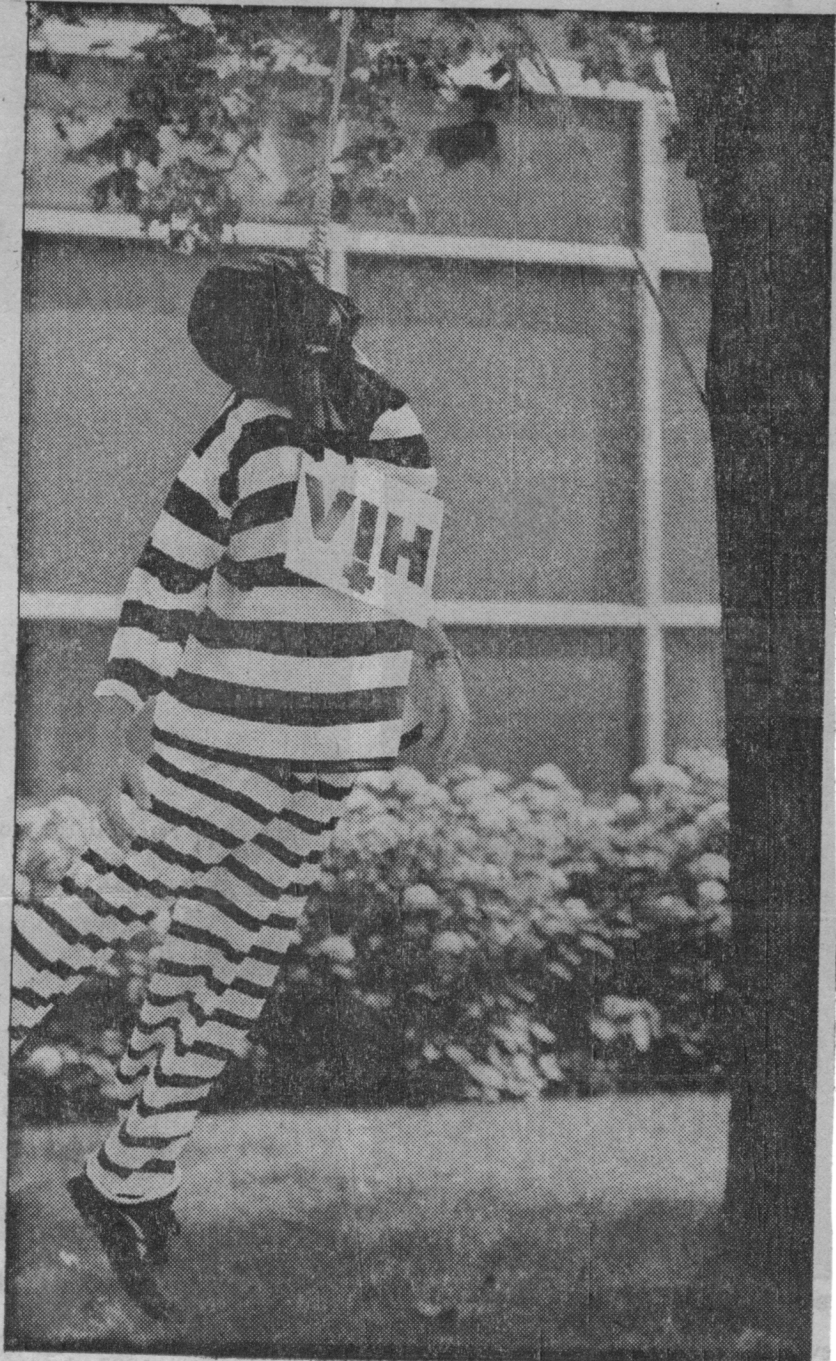
He added that the AIDS coordination centre should distribute condoms as well as needles to prisoners along with educational material about AIDS. Prisoners should also be allowed anonymous AIDS testing, Buckley said.

Provincial health and prison officials say they are working on an AIDS education program for prisoners.

"Obviously we have a high-risk population," said public security official Michel Roberge.

"We have had a committee in place for the past year to examine the situation. And we will announce a new program in October."

Roberge added that the province is considering distributing condoms in prisons. Condoms have been available in all federal prisons since January.



GAZETTE, DAVE SIDAWAY

Activists stage mock hanging to dramatize AIDS problem in prisons.