



The **BLOODY TRUTH**

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CONTACT

Tom Koch, Vice President
PBS International
10 Guest Street
Boston, MA 02135 USA

TEL: +1-617-208-0735
FAX: +1-617-208-0783

jt Koch@pbs.org
pbsinternational.org

Despite recent progress in containing the AIDS pandemic, HIV is still a killer of epic proportions. Since its discovery 30 years ago, the virus has killed more than 20 million people and devastated societies from Africa to Southeast Asia. But it has also forced the scientific community to think very hard about the nature of pandemics—their causes and consequences—in an increasingly interconnected world. When did HIV originate and where? What were the conditions that helped the virus in its relentless rise? *The Bloody Truth* accompanies three scientists from Belgium, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and the United States on their search for the origin of HIV in the hospitals and primeval forests of central Africa.

Dirk Teuwen, a trained histopathologist, and his team embark on an arduous expedition deep into DRC and Cameroon where they rescue the decaying remains of a unique medical archive; thousands of tissue samples conserved in paraffin wax. These samples shed a new and surprising light on the virus' origins, and provide vital information on how to fight potential future pandemics, such as Ebola.

The researchers uncover HIV-positive tissue samples in the DRC that prove that HIV was first transmitted to humans in southeast Cameroon around 1908, making it ground zero for the spillover of the AIDS virus from animals to humans. Three positive samples from Kinshasa dated 1963 and 1964 show that there was a pandemic raging, and that Kinshasa became the first epicenter of the AIDS pandemic in the 1960s—more than two decades before the ultimate discovery of HIV.

In their research, doctors are finding antibodies for other animal-born illnesses in blood samples, revealing that history could repeat itself and another killer virus could emerge at any time. Will mankind have learned from the AIDS pandemic and are we better prepared than 30 years ago to confront the next virus?

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CREDITS

Writer, Director: Carl Gierstorfer

Producers: Antje Boehmert, Fabrice Esteve, Paul Pauwels

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