

Medical news

Researchers say AIDS virus can be transmitted orally

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The virus that causes AIDS can easily infect individuals through the mouth, even when those individuals have no oral sores or bleeding gums, a series of studies in monkeys suggests.

The findings provide the first strong evidence that receptive oral sex puts people at risk of acquiring the fatal immune system disease.

Researchers and public health officials stressed there is still no evidence that casual contact, or even mouth-to-mouth contact such as kissing or sharing utensils, can

spread the human immunodeficiency virus, which causes AIDS in people.

But they said the monkey studies, which involved a version of the AIDS virus called simian immunodeficiency virus, offer evidence that a dose of semen from an infected man can cause AIDS in another person if it comes into contact with tissues in that person's mouth, even if it is not swallowed.

The study was conducted by researchers at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, Tufts University and the Tulane Regional Primate Center in Covington, La.

Panel suggests kindergarten AIDS classes

By Arlo Wagner
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Pointing to prevention as the only way around the AIDS crisis, a Montgomery County panel yesterday said the county should focus on a sweeping education program about the disease, including classes as early as kindergarten.

The task force also recommended the county school system commission an outside review of its AIDS education program and that it study the "feasibility of a condom availability program in junior and senior high school."

The 70-member task force, appointed in January by the county executive, also said the county needs to institute a dynamic public education program that can keep up with changes in understanding about AIDS infection, prevention and treatment.

"Prevention has to be our major emphasis" because there is no cure or vaccine expected before the next century," said County Executive Neal Potter, who gave general support to the task force recommendations.

AIDS is a moving target that is reaching epidemic proportions in Montgomery County, the task force reported yesterday.

It is estimated that more than 7,000 county residents are infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which causes AIDS, said Dr. Harold D. Gabel, task force co-chairman and director of the county's Health Department. Most of those people don't even know if they are infected, he said.

The average victim will live only 15 years after being inflicted with the disease, said Sylvia Silver, the task force's other co-chairman. Since the first case of AIDS was reported in the county in 1983, Dr. Gabel said, nearly 700 victims have been diagnosed and 441 have died.

Although education of the adult population is necessary, the task force urged the Board of Education to appoint an outside study of the HIV-AIDS curriculum in public

schools.

Mrs. Silver said the current curriculum is "good," but the task force found "some glitches in the way this is being handled. . . . Some schools are doing well. Some are having problems."

While it backed kindergarten classes in AIDS education, the task force would only say the county should study the feasibility of making condoms available to older students.

"Family life and human sexuality" classes now begin in kindergarten, but county students are not currently taught about AIDS prevention until the fifth grade, said Russ Henke, coordinator of health education in county schools. Condoms are only displayed to high school students in sex education classes, he said.

Educators feel the schools' role is to educate, while public health officials should address the issue of condom distribution, he said.

Task force member Campbell Wyllly said most parents want schools to provide sex education but that a minority of "right-wingers" are stacking parent-teacher organizations to block the courses.

"People who are strong for abstinence, we want to work with them."

But while abstinence is a sure preventive, people should be told condoms provide a high degree of safety against AIDS infection, which is mostly transmitted through sexual activity, she said. It is also transmitted through infected needles used by intravenous drug users.

Mr. Potter said any AIDS education program should especially concentrate on teen-age drinking, because drinking lowers inhibitions, and through television, since the average youth spends "as much time in front of the TV set as in front of teachers."

The task force yesterday also recommended it be allowed to continue its work and that a coordinator be hired to work with government agencies and private groups and businesses.