



To Your Health

Crisis Blood Donors Receive Notice of Infection

More than 500,000 people rushed to donate blood after the September, 11 tragedy and now letters are going out to those found to be infected with HIV, Hepatitis C and other diseases. Blood banks routinely screen all donated blood and notify the donor if an infection is confirmed. Because of the seriousness of the matter, blood is checked several times before a letter is sent.

The onslaught of new donors after the tragedy has the nation's blood banks gearing up to handle the notifications and to make

referrals for counseling. While many see this as something bad coming out of something good, I see it as something good. Knowing about the presence of a disease, especially early, allows for better treatment and better quality of life. Many of the people receiving letters would have never thought to be tested on their own.

Invisible Condom Enters Clinical Trials

The "Invisible Condom" is a liquid that becomes a gel when it encounters body heat. The gel then acts as a barrier that has been proven effective against HIV and Herpes

Simplex in the laboratory. The Invisible Condom is expected to be available in 2002. Currently testing is only being done vaginally. It is not known if the Invisible Condom has any potential for use anally.

New Test to Screen Plasma

The FDA has approved the first Nucleic Acid Test system (NAT) for screening blood plasma. NAT is able to detect minute amounts of DNA or RNA from HIV and Hepatitis C by multiplying it to detectable levels. Current tests detect antibodies that donor's own bodies make against the virus. The main problem with this is that there is a time period between contracting a virus and making antibodies. This new test reduces the time period by more than half and in clinical trials it detected several infections that current testing missed. The National Genetics Institute of Los Angeles is the developer of this new test. Govt. Grants \$9.6 Million for AIDS Oral Health Care

The department of Health and Human Services is providing a total of \$9.6 million to dental schools, hospitals and other institutions that provide oral health services for low-income, uninsured people living with HIV/AIDS. Seventy-four institutions in twenty-four states will be receiving a grant in 2001. If you are low-income and are living with HIV/AIDS please contact your local AIDS organization for further information.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that can develop after exposure to a terrifying event or ordeal in which grave physical harm occurred or was threatened. The September 11 Attack on America certainly qualifies. Many people with PTSD repeatedly re-experience the ordeal in the form of flashback episodes, memories, nightmares, or frightening thoughts, especially when they are exposed to events or objects reminiscent of the trauma. People with PTSD also experience emotional numbness and sleep disturbances, depression, anxiety, and irritability or outbursts of anger.

Feelings of intense guilt are also common. Most people with PTSD try to avoid any reminders or thoughts of the

ordeal. PTSD is diagnosed when symptoms last more than 1 month. Physical symptoms such as headaches, gastrointestinal distress, immune system problems, dizziness, chest pain, or discomfort in other parts of the body are common in people with PTSD. If you or someone you know is experiencing these symptoms please seek treatment right away.

St. Louis removes AIDS Awareness Billboards

A federal grant paid \$64,000 to put up 18 billboards to promote AIDS awareness in St. Louis, MO this year. Now, St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay says that 9 of them must come down. Eight of the billboards simply showed two shirtless black men embracing with the caption, "Brothers Loving Brothers Safely". The ninth billboard was simply a rolled up condom.

The mayor's chief of staff, Jeff Rainford, said that he didn't find the billboards offensive, "but I think little old ladies in our neighborhoods find them very offensive." Erise Williams of Blacks Assisting Blacks Against AIDS in St. Louis says, "If you're going to really support HIV ... prevention, don't succumb to the complaints or political pressure of a few people."

Smoking and Depression Intertwined

"Chronic smoking produces 'antidepressant-like' effects on the human brain," lead author Dr. Gregory A. Ordway, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson. While it has long been observed that depressed patients are more likely to smoke, researchers weren't sure if the depression made them more likely to smoke or if smoking made them more likely to be depressed.

This study says that chemicals in smoke act like anti-depressants, which explains why depressed people are drawn to smoking and why it can be so difficult for them to stop. Dr. Ordway is quick to point out that the problems caused by smoking still far outweigh this new potential benefit.

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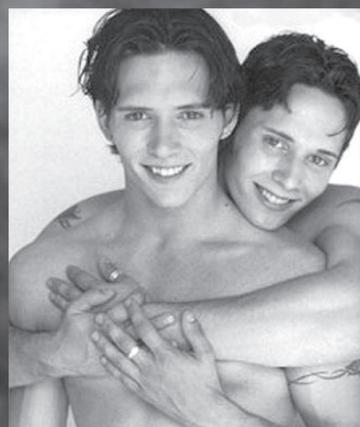


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