Surveys confirm students at risk for AIDS

Forty-two studies reveal ignorance about HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) transmission . Around 20 percent of US high school students have had more than three sex partners and about 3 percent have injected drugs-putting them at risk for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), according to surveys from the federal government.

The 42 surveys, similar to others conducted in recent years, also found continued ignorance among a large number of high school students regarding what does and doesn't cause AIDS. For example, less than half, on average, knew that mosquito bites don't cause the disease.

"The levels of misinformation are truly concerning, but not knowing that a mosquito bite does not cause AIDS doesn't put a student at risk for AIDS," said Dr. Laura Kann of the Centeers for Disease Control. "We are most concerned about the findings related to sex and drug use."

Between 7 percent and 40 percent of the students reported having four or more sex partners; the median was 21 percent. And between 2 and 5 percent said they had injected cocaine, heroin or other intravenous drugs.

" There are a large number of students throughout the United States that are at risk for human immune deficiency virus infection because of the behaviors they practice." said Kann, an adolescent health research specialist. "We need to do a better job of providing students with HIV education that would help them avoid behaviors that put them at risk."

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. The disease is transmitted chiefly by drug needles and sexual contact. Although gay males make up the largest proportion of AIDS cases, the high school surveys did not indicate the prevalence of homosexual activity.

The surveys indicated that at least some students knew the dangers of injectiong drugs and having unsafe sex but did it anyway.

Misconceptions about AIDS are still common, however. 58 percent said correctly that AIDS cannot be acquired by giving blood. But 48 percent median-knew that AIDS doesn't come from mosquito bites. And a 73 percent median knew that public toilets don't spread AIDS.

The findings, both in behavior and awareness, were similar to those in a smaller group of surveys conducted in 1988.

Depletion of rain forest causing global warming faster than previously estimated

The Earth's tropical forests are vanishing 50 percent faster than previously estimated, increasing concerns about global warming, a private environmental research group said Thursday.

"Every year the world loses an area of tropical forests almost as big as the state of Washington," said James Gustave Speth, president of World Resources Institute.

The report by the Washington-based organization said data from satellites and ground sensors, along with reports from individual governments, indicate that official estimates of tropical forest losses are far too low.

The report suggested from an analysis of 1987 data that 40 million to 50 million acres of tropical forests may be stripped each year, compared to the official estimate of about 28 million acres - based on 1980 data- that still is used by the United Nations and many governments.

Deforestation is a major concern to scientists and environmentalists because tropical forests absorb carbon dioxide and, therefore, serve as a carbon "sink" for the manmade gas, which contributes to global warming. As forests disappear, more carbon dioxide is allowed free to drift into the atmosphere, where it and other manmade pollutants act much like a greenhouse and cause the earth to warm.

Some scientists believe such warming, if not checked, will cause severe changes in weather patterns, coastal flooding and economic disruptions by the middle of the next century.

Official estimates on the extent of the deforestation problem continue to be based on the 1980 data, which show that about 28 million acres of tropical forest are lost annually. The EPA, in a draft policy options paper on global warming last year, used the 1980 figures in assessing deforestation.

According to the report, about one-third of carbon dioxide pollution each year comes from the destruction of tropical rain forests.

The report is based on data gathered in 1987 when deforestation in Brazil, which has the world's largest rain forest, was at its peak. As much as 20 million acres of forest may have been destroyed in Brazil that year, the study said.

The Brazilian government has since begun to curb deforestation, but Hammond said the destruction of the Brazilian rain forest continues at a significant rate and deforestation elsewhere is increasing.

Hazards of tanning booths and sunlamps

The Food and Drug Administration can give you the facts about the hazards of tanning booths and sunlamps as well as what you need to do to protect your skin. Ask for the poster on Tanning Booths and the pamphlet "Tan Now, Pay Later" from FDA, Division of Consumer Affairs, 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville, MD 20857, 301-443-3170.

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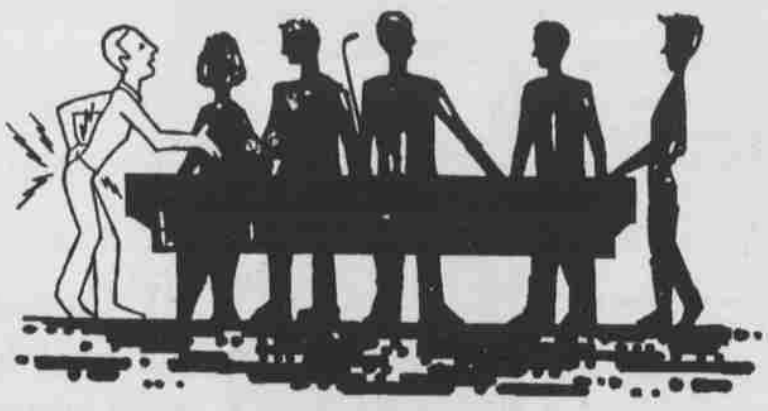

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