

# HEALTH

## ALLERGIES REPRESENT IMMUNE SYSTEM DISORDER

**DENVER** - What do New Jersey, Nevada, Nebraska, North Carolina and most of the continental United States have in common? In one word - ragweed.

This year's record summer temperatures and rainfalls across the country raised a

bumper crop of the weedy composite herb native to North America. The ragweed produces tiny yellow flowers that spawn pollen - the curse of 40 million Americans who suffer from allergic rhinitis, or hay fever.

The National Center for Health Statistics estimates that

1 in 5 Americans between the age of 6 and 74 is allergic to something. Although airborne pollen causes the most allergy symptoms, the center reports that allergens not related to airborne pollen cause symptoms in another 12 million Americans. National expenditures for allergy

drugs top \$600 million annually.

According to Harold S. Nelson, M.D., Department of Medicine staff physician at the National Jewish Center for Immunology and Respiratory Medicine in Denver, the list of substances that could cause an allergic reaction would be almost endless.

Allergies develop when an allergen - pollen, for instance - is first inhaled, touched or swallowed. The immune system, always on the lookout for invaders, sometimes misidentifies a harmless substance as a danger and attempts to destroy it by producing Y-shaped antibodies called IgE molecules. These molecules attach themselves to mast cells lining the lungs, nose and throat.

The second inhalation of pollen binds the allergen to the IgE molecules on the mast cells. At this point, the body overreacts, and mast cells respond by releasing histamine and other chemicals that produce sneezing, coughing, wheezing, hives, asthma attacks, tissue swelling and, on occasion, shock.

Although pollen and animals, especially cats, head the list of the more common allergens, others include dust mites, mold spores and some foods. Nelson currently is the principal investi-

gator in two Center studies testing treatments for pet-allergic people.

Presently, an allergy cure does not exist, although the symptoms can be treated. Along with over-the-counter anti-histamines, allergists and physicians have an arsenal of prescription allergy medications, including cromolyn and nasal steroids, and, for resistant cases, allergy injections.

"The best medicine," says Nelson, "is to avoid the offending agent." He does not recommend relocation for allergy sufferers, since allergens exist in every locale. Nelson urges people with allergies to consult their physicians about a systematic approach to obtaining relief from allergy symptoms.

For more information about allergies or National Jewish respiratory, allergic and immune system programs, call the Center's toll free LUNG LINE information service at 1-800-222-LUNG.

## THE RAPID GROWTH OF AIDS IN CHILDREN AND YOUTH

By David S. Liederman (NU) - Children and AIDS. The two don't go together, right? Wrong. AIDS is the ninth leading cause of death among children ages one to four and seventh among young people between ages 15 and 24.

The Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta reports more than 1,700 children under age 13 and over 400 teenagers in the U.S. have AIDS. These numbers underestimate the true scope of the disease, because they don't include infected children who are not showing symptoms and are therefore unreported.

Estimates are that by 1991, as many as 30,000 children may be infected by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) that causes AIDS.

Most children with AIDS are under age five and were born with the virus, passed on to them from their infected mother during pregnancy. Some were infected with the virus through contaminated blood supplies, before supplies were made safe in 1985.

### Brain and Lung Damage

Unlike adults, most children with AIDS develop the disease soon after the virus enters their bodies. These children suffer severe physical effects, such as brain damage, mental retardation, lung damage and pneumonia. And 60 percent of AIDS children will not live past age five, although recently approved medical advances significantly improve the outlook.

Many young people in their 20s likely were infected by the virus in their teens - the virus can exist up to 10 years in the body without the presence of any HIV-related symptoms.

Teenagers must be educated about HIV, since many are engaging in unprotected sexual activity. Fewer than half of all sexually active teens use contraceptives, including condoms, which can protect a person from getting the virus. The majority of HIV-infected teenagers were, in fact, infected during unprotected sexual intercourse.

### Education For Teens

Teens need to know the facts. Most know that HIV can be transmitted by sharing intravenous drug needles and having unpro-

TECTED sex. They need to know that, while HIV is transmitted through blood, semen and vaginal fluids, it is not transmitted by touching, hugging, kissing, toilet seats, doorknobs, pools and eating utensils.

They need to know that AIDS can be prevented through abstinence and condom use. They need to know about the harmful effects of drug use. The especially need people who can talk openly with them about AIDS.

There are many organizations, such as the American Red

Cross, that can help with information about AIDS. Also, the National AIDS Hotline is a 24-hour/seven-days-a-week operation: 1-800-342-AIDS or 1-800-344-SIDA (Spanish) or 1-800-AIDS TTY (hearing impaired). They can refer you to counseling and testing services in your community. Take action today to help educate yourself so that you can better educate our children and teenagers.

David S. Liederman is the Executive Director of the Child Welfare League.

## 14TH ANNUAL GREAT AMERICAN SMOKEOUT TO BE HELD NOV. 15

On November 15th, the American Cancer Society will present the 14th Annual Great American Smokeout. Held every year on the Thursday before Thanksgiving, The Great American Smokeout is a lively, upbeat event that tries to convince smokers to quit for just 24 hours. If they quit for one day, maybe they'll quit for good. Or at the very least, they'll have one success to build on in future attempts.

"Apart from holidays and April 15th, there is not another single day that captures the attention of the general public as does the American Cancer Society's Great American Smokeout," says Debbie Ebey, this year's Chairman. "It's one of the most important health days of the year."

In 1989, 35% or 17.9 million smokers participated in the Smokeout. One to three days later 3.9 million were still not smoking.

This year, the Clark County unit will kick-off the event the

night before at three different sites. Each site will feature a hot air balloon, entertainment, and free information on stopping smoking. During the day of the event, survival stations will be set up around town attempting to help people struggle through their first smoke-free day.

Fresh Start, The American Cancer Society's stop smoking clinic, will hold programs the week of and week after the smokeout. There will also be a special one night session the day of the smokeout.

"No one should have to go it alone when quitting smoking," says Ebey. "The smokeout lets

quitters know the public is behind them, and family and friends can offer the specific support a quitter needs."

For more information on local Great American Smokeout activities, contact the Clark County American Cancer Society office at 798-6877.

The American Cancer Society is the nationwide voluntary health organization dedicated to the elimination of cancer as a major health problem by preventing cancer, saving lives from cancer and diminishing suffering through research, education and service.

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