

OUR FORGOTTEN EPIDEMIC

While AIDS dominates the headlines, other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are raging out of control. Each year a far greater number of Americans—about 12 million—become infected with other debilitating STDs, reports the August 1992 *Reader's Digest*. Knowing how STDs are transmitted and treated can help you protect yourself and your loved ones.

• **Genital Warts.** Caused by a virus, genital warts usually erupt two to three months after exposure, though they may go unnoticed for years. In women, they can develop in and around the vagina and rectum, sometimes accompanied by a burning sensation. In men, the bumps usually erupt on the penis, but also inside it and in and around the anus. Treatment depends on the infection's severity and location.

• **Herpes.** Herpes sores are spread by skin-to-skin contact and erupt into red, painful blisters on the genitals, the rectum, the thighs or the lips.

The time from viral exposure to first outbreak usually lasts from two to 20 days, but it's possible to carry the virus for years before developing sores. The sores last seven to 10 days, then clear up on their own. Initial outbreaks may cause fever, swollen glands and a general feeling of illness.

Home remedies such as aspirin, ice packs and over-the-counter anesthetic creams may help. A doctor can prescribe a drug that minimizes the pain and duration of the outbreaks. Although herpes is not life-threatening in adults, the virus can kill newborns or cause brain damage, so pregnant women should tell their obstetrician if they're infected.

• **Chlamydia.** An infection caused by a bacterium, symptoms develop seven to 21 days after exposure. However, at least 75 percent of women show no symptoms unless they develop pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), a potentially fatal disease caused by an untreated STD. Vaginal discharge is the most common symptom. Painful urination and vaginal bleeding are also possible. In men, symptoms include painful urination and a clear or whitish discharge.

• **Gonorrhea.** A woman's risk of contracting gonorrhea from a single, unprotected encounter with an infected man is 50 to 90 percent while a man's risk is only 20 percent. Generally treated with antibiotics, gonorrhea can infect the geni-

itals, throat and rectum. Penile symptoms — a pus-like discharge and burning or pain on urination — usually develop within a week of exposure. However, up to 20 percent of men and 80 percent of women experience no symptoms. Gonorrhea can be diagnosed with a simple test provided free by most health departments.

• **Syphilis.** If left untreated, syphilis can have serious complications. Ten days to three months after infection, a painless sore develops. In women, these sores may develop internally, making them difficult to discover. Within one to five weeks, the sore clears up without treatment. But within two months, more sores or a rash may develop, usually on the soles of the feet or the palms.

SIPI EXPANDS SERVICE TO MINORITY MEDIA ANNOUNCES PUBLICATION OF: HEALTHWIRE

New York, N.Y.—The Scientists Institute for Public Information (SIPI) has announced the premiere issue of HEALTHWIRE, a monthly health, science, and technology news column and service for print and broadcast media serving African American, Latino, Native American, and Asian communities.

Initially, more than 600 media organizations nationwide will receive HEALTHWIRE, which kicks off the expanded activities of SIPI's Minority Media Information Center.

The Center was created to

Mucus patches containing the microorganism that causes the disease may develop in the mouth, and the disease may be passed by kissing.

Untreated, syphilis enters a symptomless stage that may last years. But eventually devastating complications can develop—blindness, deafness, insanity and damage to the heart and other major organs. Penicillin is the treatment of choice.

Remember: STDs strike anyone who's sexually active. If you are not in a long-term monogamous relationship, use condoms. But they do not provide complete protection. If you suspect you have an STD, consult a doctor or call your health department. You can also call the free, anonymous National STD Hotline (1-800-227-8922).

increase the media coverage of culturally relevant health and science issues, while providing a channel for minority health and science experts to communicate with the media.

"Science is too important to be left in the hands of scientists and government officials," said Fred Jerome, Executive V.P. of SIPI, "and the best way to disseminate science and health information is through the media."

HEALTHWIRE's coverage will span a variety of controversial issues and new develop-

HEALTH

American Heart Association

Sex and Heart Disease

Thousands of Americans who experience heart disease, heart attack and heart surgery, face imposing challenges as they recover. New diet and exercise programs, new medications, or a general need to "take care of themselves" are typically easy to confront. But many patients return home facing another question: Does heart disease mean an end to a satisfying sex life? According to the American Heart Association the answer is "no."

The myths surrounding the idea of sex and heart disease are numerous. One of the most common is that sex often brings on a heart attack or sudden death. To the contrary, the American Heart Association says that the risk is very low. In fact, the physical demands of sex are mild and comparable to briskly walking up two flights of stairs.

There should be a short recovery period before resuming sex. Usually a patient can resume sexual activities within about four weeks after a heart attack or two to three weeks after leaving the hospital from heart surgery. The patient also should talk freely with his or her physician about resuming sexual activity.

If you have heart disease, have had a heart attack or undergone heart surgery, the American Heart Association suggests that you keep these important guidelines in mind:

- If you are not sure whether you're ready for sex, have your doctor give you an exercise test to check your physical capacity;
- Improve and maintain a good physical condition;
- Choose a time when you are rested, relaxed and free from the stressful feelings brought on by the day's schedules and responsibilities;
- Wait one to three hours after eating a full meal;
- Select a familiar, peaceful setting that is free from interruptions;
- Take medicine prior to sexual relations if prescribed by the doctor.

When you and your spouse feel comfortable and secure about your sex life, things should start to improve in other areas of your lives as well.

For more information, contact your nearest American Heart Association.

ments in health, science, and technology research, including environmental racism; cultural issues and AIDS prevention; and medical and science education for minority students. HEALTHWIRE's features and news tips will be produced by the people who know the issues best—minority scientists, community activist, physicians and experts from other fields.

Journalists requiring additional information sources can also contact SIPI's Media Resources Service (MRS) for names and phone numbers drawn from a data base of more than 25,000 health and science professionals who have agreed to work with the media. The MRS can be reached at 212-661-9110 in New York; and 1-800-223-1730 from the rest of the country. HEALTHWIRE will be free of charge and available

in Spanish and English. Each column will include a "news-you-can-use" segment, supplying phone numbers and resources for readers.

SIPI is a national, non-profit organization, founded in 1963 by scientists concerned about

the public's understanding of critical science issues. Since that time, the organization has expanded its media information programs to cover issues as diverse as child health and development, the environment, and national security.

HEALTH BRIEFS

ARTHRITIS FOUNDATION OFFERS MONTHLY SUPPORT GROUPS

The Rheumatoid Arthritis Support Group, sponsored by the Arthritis Foundation, meets the third Tuesday of each month. The next meeting will be held 7-8:30 p.m., August 18 in the conference room at the Special Children's Clinic, 1161 South Valley View.

The Arthritis Foundation also sponsors a monthly general support group for those affected by arthritis. The August meeting will be from 1-3:30 p.m., August 22 in the clubhouse at Desert Inn Mobile Estates III. The program is a video presentation of "Feeling Good With Arthritis" hosted by the Emmy award winning physician Alan Xenakis, M.D.

Call the Arthritis Foundation at 367-1626 for additional information about the support groups or other services available.

CPR WORKSHOP

A CPR Workshop takes place 11:30 am, Saturday, August 15 at the Stewart/Mojave Sports Center, 275 N. Mojave Rd. The 90-minute seminar will cost \$11 and includes a one-year certification. This program is designed for teens and adults, and sponsored by the City of Las Vegas. To pre-register, call 229-6563.

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AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY
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Ophthalmology and Ophthalmic Surgery
Diplomate American Board of Ophthalmology

2316 W. Charleston
Suite 120
Las Vegas, NV 89102
(702) 258-8128



1905 McDaniel Street
Suite 102
North Las Vegas, NV 89030
(702) 642-7952