

HEALTH

Group: Condom use crucial in AIDS fight

WASHINGTON (IPS)— The use of condoms worldwide must triple in order to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually-transmitted diseases, according to a report by a prominent U.S. public health agency.

An estimated six to nine billion condoms are used throughout the world each year, but this number must be increased to 24 billion in order to impede the spread of AIDS and other diseases, says the study, "Closing the Condom Gap," by the John Hopkins School of Public Health in Baltimore, Md.

"Narrowing the gap between the need and use of condoms is a major public health challenge," the report said.

New efforts are needed to make condoms more accessible, including lowering their cost, effectively promoting their use, and overcoming the many social and personal obstacles to their use, particularly in developing countries where the impact of AIDS is most acute, it said.

At least 33 million people worldwide are living with HIV/AIDS, and another 14 million have died. Some 16,000 new infections are estimated to occur every day, about 60 percent of them in women, many of whom pass the disease along to their newborn children.

Nearly six million people became infected last year alone, according to the U.N. special AIDS program, about two-thirds of whom live in sub-Saharan Africa. Several countries in the southern part of Africa report that more than 20 percent of their adult population is infected.

AIDS is also spreading

quickly in Asia, particularly in South and Southeast Asia. The region is believed to account for another 20 percent of all new 1998 infections.

In addition to the toll exacted by AIDS last year, other sex-related diseases infected some 333 million people, according to the report, which is based on dozens of recent studies.

Most of all diseases could be prevented if people used condoms correctly and consistently, according to the report which notes, "Laboratory tests show that no sexually-transmitted infection, including HIV, can penetrate an intact latex condom."

Still, people often are reluctant or unable to use them. Many simply don't like the condom as a form of contraception, but many more cannot afford them or obtain them easily. Still others believe they face little or no risk of pregnancy or disease.

Unmarried young people are especially at risk, according to the report. Many face social pressures to have sex but have difficulty getting condoms, in part because many family-planning programs are not geared toward them.

"Family planning programs usually focus on the contraceptive needs of married women, while much of the need for condoms is to prevent HIV/AIDS and other infections among unmarried people, particularly youth," the report stated.

Half of all people who become infected are between the ages of 10 and 25 years. "In the era of AIDS young people need guidance, encouragement, and access to condoms."

Study: Minorities more prone to diabetes

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Hispanic and black children are apparently more prone to developing an adult form of diabetes that can lead to heart attacks, strokes, blindness and amputations if it's not diagnosed and treated early, researchers said Saturday.

But more research needs to be done to target specific risk factors among different ethnic groups, said the scientists, who released their findings at the annual conference of the American Diabetes Association.

Two separate studies conducted by researchers at New York's Naomi Berrie Diabetes Center at Columbia Presbyterian Center and the UCSD School of Medicine concluded that obesity also plays a major factor in whether children will develop Type II diabetes, a form of diabetes usually seen in people 45 years and older.

Almost 16 million people in the United States have

diabetes, the sixth-leading cause of death in the country. The most common and serious form of diabetes is Type II; Type I is less common, but easier to diagnose and generally affects children.

"Type II diabetes was practically unheard of in young people until the last few years, and its recent appearance is alarming," said Dr. Robin S. Goland, co-director of the Naomi Berrie Diabetes Center.

The UCSD study assessed 58 children and teen-agers of different ethnicities who had been diagnosed with Type II diabetes. All except one were overweight. More than 50 percent were Hispanic and 19 percent were black.

In the Columbia Presbyterian study, researchers studied 19 obese children. Nearly half were Hispanic and 37 percent were black. In both studies, Caucasian, Asian, American Indian children were also part of the study.



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