

Take-home HIV tests: Are they good or bad?

By Maiya Norton
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - The Food and Drug Administration's Blood Products Advisory Committee is in the preliminary stages of determining whether to allow HIV tests to be sold over the counter.

The pros and cons of such wide access were discussed during a recent panel discussion involving members of the FDA, HIV/AIDS activists, professors and manufacturers.

OraSure Technologies, the manufacturing company of the OraSure and OraQuick rapid testing methods, is pushing for a space on the shelf at the pharmacy. Such tests would allow people to anonymously learn their HIV status in less than an hour, without hassle and potentially without immediate counseling.

"It's kind of early to know where things stand," says Jessica Frickey, spokesperson for the Centers for Disease Control. Present at the FDA's recent panel, Frickey realized a lot more research needs to be done before the CDC takes a position on it.

"Bottom line: If more people would be willing to take a test at home and find out their status then that's the best outcome we could ask for," Frickey says. "We have data that shows when people know they have HIV, they take steps to protect their partners from infection."

Much of that data was collected by physicians. And the home test could lessen interaction with a medical expert.

Throughout her college years at Spelman College in Atlanta, Daniela Edison made regular HIV testing a

way of life. Though she felt uncomfortable with the physicians discussing the testing with her, she now understands the impact they had.

"It was embarrassing, to be young and talking about safe sex and everything with a stranger," Edison says. "I've been blessed to be okay, but if I wasn't I would have needed a counselor there for comfort."

Imaginations can run wild when thinking about the implications of at-home testing. People could easily misunderstand their tests or lash out emotionally and harm themselves or others. Even though panelists were divided over

where administering a test at home is the best course of action, most can agree that having some form of formal counseling and education about HIV/AIDS testing, prevention and treatment is vital.

"Certainly if you take an HIV test of this nature, a test that searches for antibodies to HIV, if you get a negative test it doesn't necessarily mean that you don't have HIV," Frickey says. "It could mean that you have HIV and your antibodies aren't yet detectable."

That's why some have reservations. "I think I would lean toward it not being

available unless counseling was a part of purchasing the product which you and I both know isn't going to happen," said Clarence Stewart, certified sex educator with the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapists. "You're dealing with something that will kill you or something that you will have the rest of your life. You mean to tell me that once you find out that you are not going to want to talk to somebody?"

With African-American women in the lead for being at risk, Stewart is concerned for those who are primarily getting infected from their

male partners.

"There's a possibility that it's going to change within the next few years because what's the number one minority group in the United States?" Stewart asked, referring to the growing Hispanic population.

"On a whole, results would be given and treated a lot quicker; however, I think the biggest problem would be people testing secretly and not sharing results and going untreated," Patricia DuPont, a licensed psychotherapist said. "We tend to avoid therapy, in general, and there's a cultural stigma against it. So we as Blacks

would likely not seek out the courses of treatment, both medically and psychologically."

When Marcel Watkins was diagnosed with HIV a year ago, he needed all the support he could find.

"I was in denial even though I had a doctor staring me in the face like 'You are HIV positive,'" the investment banker in San Diego said. It was through visits with his doctor and the pressure put on him to begin taking medicine that Watkins faced reality. "If I found that out at home and alone," he said, "I think I'd have gone on like nothing happened."

Warning: Flavored cigarette sales on rise

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON - One year after anti-tobacco advocates announced that the tobacco industry was pushing flavored cigarettes to entice Black youngsters to smoke, a Harvard University study has found that while overall cigarette sales have decreased, sales of some flavored tobacco products have increased nearly 10 percent and new products have been added to the shelves.

"Tobacco manufacturers have recently introduced a proliferation of exotic brands featuring candy-like flavors. We reviewed internal tobacco industry documents and patents to assess the role of flavored cigarettes in the targeting of young smokers," states a report by the Harvard School of Public Health published last week in the health policy journal, Health Affairs.

"These brand extensions are being heavily marketed to

youth and racial/ethnic groups, with colorful and stylish packaging and flavors that mask the harsh and toxic properties of tobacco smoke. While overall cigarette sales have fallen, RJ Reynolds' Camel brand family experienced a 9.8 percent sales volume increase during the past year, coinciding with the introduction of flavored brand extensions."

Camel is the same brand that especially appeals to Black middle and high school students, said Julia Cartwright, a spokeswoman for the American Legacy Foundation, which funded the study with the National Cancer Institute. According to a 2002 National Tobacco Youth Survey conducted by the Center for Disease Control, 6 percent of middle school students and 9 percent of high school students smoked flavored Camels.

The overall high school smoking rate for Black students is 14 percent, compared

to 26 percent for Whites. The CDC reports that the 14 percent for African-Americans is a major reduction from 22 percent six years ago. Many critics see the expansion of flavored cigarettes as an effort to reverse those smoking trends.

Continuing its marketing last year, Reynolds introduced candy-flavored cigarettes, including Midnight Berry, Cherry Cheesecake, and Warm Winter Toffee.

"Obviously when you have tobacco industry documents showing the industry luring young people subtly to a lifetime of tobacco addiction, that's concerning," Cartwright said. "These are all flavors designed specifically to appeal right to youth... Eighty percent of smokers start as teenagers."

The Harvard report, titled "New Cigarette Brands with Flavors that Appeal to Youth: Tobacco Marketing Strategies," was released 15 months after a group of anti-tobacco advocates, including Morehouse School of Medicine President Dr. James R. Gavin III, accused Reynolds of stepping up a campaign to appeal to Black youth by exploiting hip-hop music and imagery through its promotions, packaging and flavoring of Kool cigarettes.

The new study was based on a search of the Web-based tobacco industry collection of more than 7 million documents made public through the 1998 Master Settlement [court] Agreement between 46 state attorneys general and major U.S. tobacco manufacturers. The collection is housed and updated at the University of California, San Francisco. Harvard researchers Carrie M. Carpenter,

Geoffrey Ferris Wayne, John L. Pauly, Howard K. Koh and Gregory N. Connolly conducted the study but entering key words such as flavor delivery and filter.

R. J. Reynolds' spokesman Brennan Dawson could not be reached for a response to the new study, which not only indicates the industry has stepped up its marketing to youth, but has long studied ways to capture the youth market. His phone line was constantly busy. However, Dawson has been quoted as saying RJ Reynolds has taken "extraordinary steps" to not appeal to youngsters, such as holding cigarette-sponsored functions inside clubs that do not admit teens. As for retailing cigarettes — flavored or otherwise — state laws mandate that one has to be at least 18 and show a drivers license, he said.

But the study cites documents as old as 30 years that indicate that the cigarette industry's long-held denial about marketing to youth is a smokescreen.

"Internal studies of differences in taste and flavor preferences by age group con-

firmed that younger smokers are more open to unique and exotic flavors than their older counterparts," the report states.

"A 1984 [Brown and Williamson] taste segmentation study suggested that 28 percent of young smokers (under age 35) preferred robust tastes, compared with 21 percent and 12 percent of smokers ages 35-54 and age 55 and older, respectively. Younger smokers (22 percent) preferred fruit flavors more than those ages 35-54 (20 percent) and ages 55 and older (13 percent)."

The study also cites a 1993 document from Lorillard, the manufacturer of Newport, that states, "Growing interest in new flavor sensations among younger adult consumers may indicate new opportunities for enhanced-flavor tobacco products that could leverage Newport's current strength among younger adult smokers."

The 1998 Master Settlement was the result of a 1995 lawsuit by the National Association of Attorneys General. (See Cigarettes, Page 9)



ORDINATION CELEBRATION

During a service of Episcopal Consecration and Ordination last month, the Rev. James Rogers of Greater New Jerusalem Baptist Church, and husband and wife the Rev. Candace Shields and the Rev. Henry Shields of Twice Called Christian Center of San Bernardino, Calif., were ordained as bishops. Pictured: James Rogers and wife Jessie.

Creative Touch Designs
presents
Mr. James
from L.A. to LV.

FOR HAIR THAT'S WORKABLE
SIMPLE & HEALTHY

HE'S MAKING IT HAPPEN AT
THE NEW
KISS-KISS

4705 S. DURANGO, STE. 110
call 943-3444 • EXT. 109 salon
OR 205-9955 mobile