

# Doctors encourage condom use to prevent the spread of AIDS

By B.J. Thomsen  
Of the Emerald

Nearly 600 people in the United States have contracted AIDS through heterosexual activity, according to figures released Jan. 12 by the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta.

The number of heterosexuals infected with the AIDS virus is rising faster than in other "high-risk" groups, such as among gay and bisexual men and intravenous drug users.

This is because the virus has only recently been introduced into the group and because individuals in high-risk groups have begun practicing safe-sex techniques while heterosexuals still consider AIDS a homosexual disease, said Dr. David Fleming, deputy state epidemiologist.

The use of safe-sex practices by risk groups can be documented because of the dramatic drop in incidents of other sexually transmitted diseases in those groups, Fleming said.

Currently in Oregon, there are no cases of AIDS through heterosexual contact.

About 700 college-aged people in the United States have contracted the AIDS virus, said Dr. James Jackson, director of the University's student health center.

The best defense people have against contracting the AIDS virus, aside from abstaining from sex altogether, is the condom, he said.

Studies show that the AIDS virus cannot pass through the wall of a condom, said Jackson.

The AIDS virus is present in blood and body fluids, primarily semen and vaginal secretions, Fleming said.

Since 90 percent of male intravenous drug users are heterosexual, needle sharing is a primary way for the virus to enter the heterosexual community, Fleming said.

He also pointed out that the virus in no way discriminates and can be transmitted from male to male, male to female and even female to female if vaginal secretions are passed between individuals.

Some researchers have found small amounts of the virus in saliva, but there are no documented cases of the virus being transmitted by kissing, Fleming said. He cautioned that to be absolutely safe, people should avoid "deep kissing where saliva is exchanged with a person known to be carrying the AIDS virus."

People who use intravenous drugs or have had sex with someone who uses intravenous drugs, people who have sex with bisexual men and people who have sex with prostitutes, are all at risk, Jackson said.

The drug AZT seems to prevent replication of the AIDS virus, Jackson said, but it is not a cure.

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unable to give any opinion on the topic because of the relative newness of the controversy.

State health department officials and AIDS activists are encouraging broadcasters to consider allowing the advertisements to appear.

Robert McAllister, the Oregon State Health Division AIDS program coordinator, said condoms are extremely important in preventing people from contracting the AIDS virus, and by allowing the ads on television, broadcasters would be raising public consciousness.

"Many broadcasters and certain segments of society may see advertising condoms as advertising birth control. That's not the issue in this context," McAllister said. "This is not birth control, it's disease control."

Scott Seibert, chairman of the Mid-Valley Action Committee, an AIDS education group, said many television programs promote irresponsible sexual activity. He sees advertising condoms as promoting responsible sexual activity.

"To deny advertising condoms is signing the death warrants of people who need to know that information," Seibert said.

Stations in the Eugene/Springfield area have been forced to think about and develop some kind of policy toward condom advertising in case they ever are approached by condom manufacturers or other groups wanting to advertise condoms as an AIDS preventative.

KMTR, the NBC affiliate in the area, already has adopted a condom advertising policy, although they have yet to receive a request from anyone wishing to advertise, said station president and general manager Bob Davis.

"We have decided to accept

advertising for condoms," he said. "They will be subject to copy approval and a time restriction. We're labeling them as adult products, so they can only be aired between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. and after 9 p.m. on weekdays."

Davis said the reasoning behind the decision was quite coincidental.

"I had just run into our former assistant program director at a meeting in Los Angeles. She now is working at KRON and was telling me about their new policy," he said. "When I got back, I was asked by our news team what our policy was because they were doing a special program on the topic. At that time, we didn't have a policy."

"I feel very comfortable with the decision," Davis said. "I have teenage daughters, and I would rather have them aware of the situation than in the dark."

Bruce Liljgren at KEZI believes the station would seriously consider airing condom advertising, although like

KMTR, they have not received any request to do so, he said.

"There may be a cry from a certain section of the community (if any ads are aired), but I don't know how loud that cry will be," he said. "We try to program to a majority of our audience, and I believe a majority of our audience will support condom advertising."

Liljgren said he will be surprised if any of the condom manufacturers choose to test the ads in the Eugene/Springfield area before other major markets.

Jim Putney, the KVAL station manager, expressed some concern about the issue.

"We are not at the present time accepting any condom advertising," he said. "This is an extremely sensitive area. We don't want to promote the usage of condoms in a 'Sex is okay with the use of a condom' manner."

Putney believes that his station and the broadcasting profession have a responsibility to serve the public's best interest.

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