

Doctor says human clone is weeks away

Ken Dilanian

Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

ROME — The world's first human clone should be born in about seven weeks, a controversial Italian gynecologist said at a news conference here Tuesday.

Severino Antinori offered no evidence for his assertion.

During a feisty give-and-take with reporters at Rome's Foreign Press Club, he repeatedly declined to say where the mother was living, citing the need to protect her.

"I receive a lot of threats," he said. Antinori — who in 1994 helped a

62-year-old Italian woman become the oldest new mother in history — is part of a consortium of doctors that announced last year it would attempt human cloning. In April, he told an interviewer that the group had successfully implanted cloned embryos in three women.

On Tuesday, Antinori said the mother of what would be the first human clone ever born was 33 weeks pregnant.

"I expect it during the first week in January," he said. "An absolutely healthy baby will be born."

He said ultrasound scans —

which he did not provide — indicated the fetus weighed between 5.5 and 5.9 pounds.

With all the bombast he could muster, Antinori also blasted the Vatican, which has roundly condemned him, and expressed concern that the Italian secret services might put a tail on him.

He scolded a German reporter, complaining that German newspapers had likened him to Adolf Hitler.

And he accused a rival scientist of planting a spy in the consortium.

Asked why he supported human cloning, Antinori, who runs a private

fertility clinic here, said millions of infertile couples could benefit from the technology.

In April, he was quoted in Rome's *Il Tempo* newspaper as saying that the most developed of the three fetuses came from the cell of a wealthy Arab man. At other times, he has said the two other women pregnant with clones were in former Soviet republics.

Cloning is designed to create the genetic twin of a life form. Scientists remove the DNA from an egg cell and insert the DNA from the adult being cloned. If it works, the

egg cell begins to divide and grows into an embryo, which then can be transferred to a female and carried to term.

In the five years since the cloning of the famous sheep Dolly, scientists have duplicated a variety of animals. But because of the risks of severe abnormalities and other ethical considerations, most industrialized countries, including the United States and Italy, have banned human cloning.

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Women make up half of AIDS sufferers, U.N. says

Jeremy Manier

Chicago Tribune (KRT)

CHICAGO — For the first time, about half the people worldwide living with the virus that causes AIDS are women, according to estimates in a new United Nations report.

The figures also present a stark warning about the swift inroads the deadly disease is making among millions of heterosexual victims from China — where officials fear there could be 10 million cases within a decade — to Africa.

HIV has so thoroughly devastated parts of southern Africa that it is amplifying the effects of an already

urgent food crisis, with up to 60 percent of farms reporting some loss of agricultural workers to AIDS, according to the U.N. report released Tuesday.

Most of the disease's spread in Asia is coming from heterosexual contact and intravenous drug use, adding to concerns that the toll there could climb rapidly.

"We are far away from the gay white men's disease (AIDS) used to be," said Peter Piot, executive director of the U.N. program UNAIDS. "Heterosexual transmission is on the rise in just about every continent."

Amid the worsening crisis of a dis-

ease that infects 42 million worldwide, the new report offers signs of hope that some prevention efforts are working. In Cambodia, rates of HIV infection among prostitutes have fallen steadily since 1998 as their use of condoms has increased.

Infection rates among young mothers in South Africa edged down in the last three years from 21 percent to about 15 percent, an improvement experts traced to more young people delaying their first sexual activity, limiting their number of sexual partners and using condoms.

One source of the increase in women's HIV numbers is simple bi-

ology. Researchers have long known that because of the way fluids are exchanged during sex, it's easier for women to contract HIV from men than it is for men to get the virus from women.

But young women also may be at increased risk for infection in parts of Africa and Southeast Asia because some older men believe it's safer to have sex with younger partners with less sexual experience.

In areas where most infected men do not know they are carrying the virus, that's a recipe for spreading the disease to a new generation of women, experts say. Women ac-

count for 58 percent of HIV-infected adults in Sub-Saharan Africa, according to the new report.

The new U.N. estimates suggest that women still account for slightly fewer HIV cases than men: 19.2 million adult women worldwide, compared with 19.4 million adult men. Children make up another 3.2 million cases. U.N. officials said this is the first time the estimates for men and women have been nearly equal.

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News briefs

President Bush signs terrorism-insurance bill

WASHINGTON — President Bush signed a sweeping bill Thursday to help the insurance industry cover catastrophic acts of terrorism like the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, but with a major catch: Taxpayers would bear much of the cost.

In a White House ceremony, the president justified his departure from free-market principles by saying commercial developers can now go ahead with more than \$15 billion in construction projects stalled by the lack of terrorism coverage.

"The nation's hard hats will get back to work, being able to put food on the table for their families," Bush told an audience that included construction workers and insurance officials. "Investors in markets will have greater confidence that our economy is strong enough to withstand a future attack."

In the event of another massive attack, the cost to taxpayers could be hefty. The industry would make insurance payments equal to 7 percent of premiums in the first year, with taxpayers picking up 90 percent of the remainder of the cost, up to a total of \$100 billion.

The industry's "deductible," or

initial share of the costs, would rise to 15 percent of premiums in the third and final year of the program in 2005, although the law could easily be extended by Congress.

But the cost-sharing plan still heavily favors the industry, according to critics, and essentially turns the federal government into the insurer of last resort. Economist Stephen More, who heads a political action committee supporting conservative candidates, said the bill "smacks of corporate welfare. It's basically a giveaway."

— William Neikirk, *Chicago Tribune* (KRT)

Sharon holds solid lead against Netanyahu

JERUSALEM — After two years of fighting the latest Palestinian rebellion, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon still has strong support among the Israeli public and is poised for a decisive leadership win over his closest Likud party rival, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Sharon must garner half the votes in Thursday's primary to retain the party chairmanship and move toward a nationwide election in January. Recent polls show Sharon leading Netanyahu, the current foreign minister and a former prime minister, by 18 points.

Netanyahu is campaigning hard but has hinted in speeches that he

expects to suffer a political setback. In banquets halls and media appearances, Netanyahu repeatedly raised the possibility of keeping the Foreign Ministry post he acquired just a month ago in a Sharon Cabinet shake-up.

Sharon, ever the tactician, has only said he would be "glad" to see Netanyahu as foreign minister, leaving options open for whatever coalition possibilities arise from the January balloting.

Sharon's appeal, at a most unsettled time in Israel, may well stem from the political risks he has been willing to take within the Likud

Party and with Israeli voters at large, analysts said. Sharon time and again has positioned himself as "the man in the middle," as one analyst said, a leader providing much-needed political ballast in a year of volatile emotions.

"What Israelis don't want ... when buses are blowing up is for the political system to pull us apart," said Reuven Hazan, a political analyst at Hebrew University.

If Sharon wins Thursday, he and Likud will have a real fight on their hands for the first time in nearly two years.

Labor candidate Amram Mitzna,

who last week won that party leadership race handily over former Defense Minister Benjamin Ben Eliezer, has promised to offer a "clear alternative" to the present policy of fighting terrorism solely with military might.

Mitzna, mayor of Haifa and a former general, has bluntly called Sharon's policy a failure for Israeli society, unable to provide foolproof security and wreaking economic havoc. Fight terror, he said in a speech this week, but negotiate at the same time.

— Christine Spolar, *Chicago Tribune* (KRT)

Today's crossword solution

QUAD	GAGA	RANIS
UNTO	HILL	EMOTE
OTTO	OREO	TELEX
TIARAS	AUTONOMY	
EER	STANDARD	
	SPIN	UTAHAN
DISC	NICE	STONO
ODOR	GLARE	ONTO
POLAR	EMIL	REIN
ELOPES	CLAY	
	PLANTAIN	UNO
REVIEWER	PARSON	
ALIEN	VOWS	EATS
HOIST	EPEE	AGEE
SNITS	REDS	REST

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