

# American Indian Youth and HIV

by Nancy Butterfield

*Names and other details have been changed to protect privacy.*

A year ago, Louanne Brown was 16 years old, in love, and expecting her first baby. She planned to return to high school after giving birth, and was determined to stick with her plans to go on to college.

The young Native American woman regarded her prospective motherhood not as an obstacle, but as a challenge she welcomed.

Today, Louanne realizes the challenges she faces are far greater than she ever imagined.

Dave, her 28-year-old boyfriend, broke off their relationship about eight months ago, and Louanne learned recently that he is living with another American Indian teenage girl, who also is pregnant with his baby.

Two months later Louanne learned that she is HIV positive. Her baby daughter, born last August, also has tested positive for the AIDS virus.

"I thought my biggest concern would be finding enough time to take care of my baby, and still do my homework and play basketball," Louanne said in a recent interview. "Now, I'm just focusing on staying alive, and keeping my baby healthy."

The statistics of AIDS cast an especially long shadow over her baby. Louanne's doctor has told

her that as many as 80 percent of babies born with the AIDS virus will die by the age of three. She is praying that her daughter, Kayla, will beat the odds.

Like basketball superstar Magic Johnson, Louanne also has had to give up the sport she loves in order to safeguard her health. She is concerned about the risk of wearing down her fragile immune system further.

And sometimes Louanne still has trouble believing she could have become infected with the AIDS virus.

"I've never used needles to take drugs, and I'm not gay, and I'm Indian, so I always figured I was safe from AIDS," she said. "I knew my boyfriend took drugs sometimes, but I didn't find out until recently that he shoots up."

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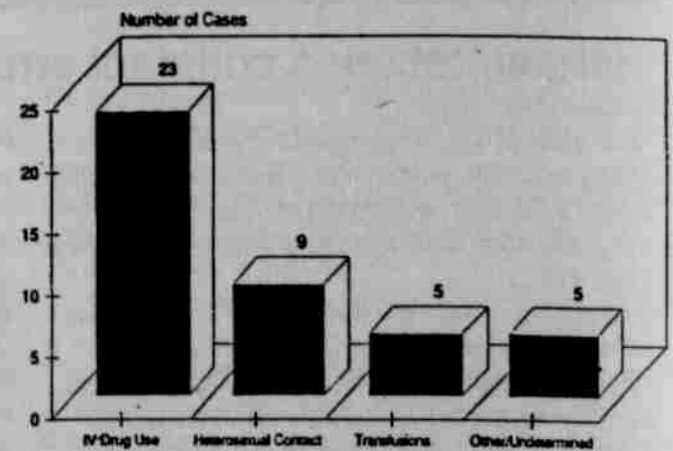
Louanne said she is positive she contracted the disease through unprotected sex with Dave, who also is Native American.

"I was a virgin before I met him," she said. "We were together for about six months before I left home and moved in with him, and he's the only guy I've ever had sex with."

This lack of understanding about how AIDS is transmitted is directly responsible for the growing numbers of Native American teenagers with the AIDS virus, health officials believe.

"There is a kind of belief that Indians, especially those who live on reservations, don't get AIDS," said Lorelle Pintado, director of health education and prevention for Seattle Indian Health Board. "But that's just not true. Indians get AIDS in all the same ways non-Indians do, including having

## Adult Female Indian AIDS Cases: How Were They Infected?



sexual intercourse or sharing needles with an HIV-infected person."

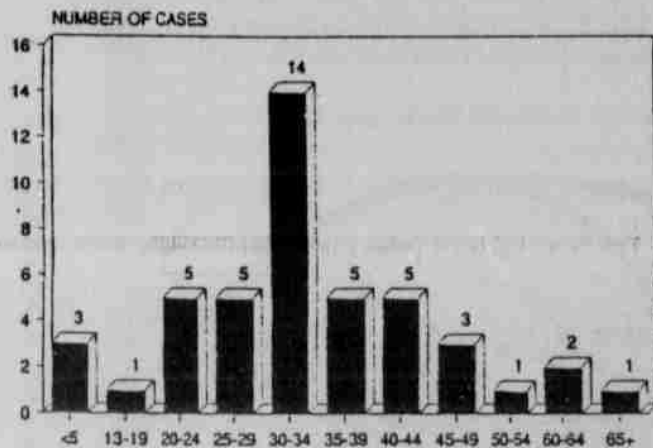
American Indians, including many teenagers, travel from cities and reservations to rodeos, conferences, powwows, tournaments and ceremonies, all over the U.S. and Canada, Health Authority officials point out.

According to the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia, there are 305 American Indians diagnosed with the AIDS virus. Dr. Emmett Chase, AIDS coordinator for Indian Health Service, said there are an estimated 12 to 13 new Indian AIDS cases each month. About one-fifth of all AIDS cases are teenagers.

A more alarming figure is that American Indians have had a 91% increase in AIDS cases -- largest percentage of any ethnic group in the nation -- from 1989 to 1990.

Some Indians use IV drugs, and many have unprotected sex. So Indian teenagers face all the same risks as their non-Indian counterparts, plus additional ones.

Alcohol and drug abuse, which have higher rates among American Indian teenagers than white teenagers, compound the risk factor. Because alcohol and illegal drugs impair judgement, the possibility is increased that teenagers under their influence will engage in high-risk behavior.



**Congratulations** to Larry and Patricia Tasa of Hillsboro. On February 9 they added a new addition to the family. Jacob Clarence Tasa weighed 4 pounds and 3 ounces and measured in at 17 inches. Jacob was welcomed by his brothers Larry Jr. and Greg and sisters Marie and Mandy. Also by his Grandmother Melvina Mary Lindahl of Hillsboro.

## Arts: Crafts and Supplies

The Economic Development Department is considering a proposal to open a arts and crafts co-op here in Grand Ronde during the spring of 1992.

The arts and crafts co-op would sell the crafts of tribal members and, also, finance supplies for the artisans.

If you are an artistically inclined tribal member and are interested in being a part of the arts and crafts co-op, then please don't miss the meeting on March 16, at 5:30pm in the Forestry Building to discuss the plans.

Please bring with you samples or pictures of your work and an approximation of how many you could produce in any given amount of time. This is important because the Economic Development Department needs to know what you make, what price you sell it for, how much of it can you make, and what supplies you need to make it.

For more information, please contact Shelley Hanson at 879-5211 ext. 153.

## IHS: Smoking causes 40% of deaths in Indian Country

By Cathy Cline, Editor

Bryson Liberty and Bruce Myers of the Indian Health Services (IHS) in Portland presented the Tribal Council with staggering statistics on the effects of smoking in Indian Country.

Liberty and Myers work with tribal governments across the state to establish a smoking policy on tribal and reservation lands. To date they have written smoking policies for more than 39 tribes.

The policies include the guidelines of when and where a person may smoke on tribal or reservation lands and also the penalties for violation of the policy. Currently, the legal aspects are being evaluated by the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde's lawyers and may possibly include updating the tribes existing smoking policy.

"There are approximately 430,000 deaths caused by diseases directly related to tobacco," Myers said.

The tobacco industry is a billion dollar a year industry which pays people to keep this kind of information out of the hands of the American people, he said.

Directly related to Indian Country "up to 50-54% of adult Indians over 18 smoke cigarettes regularly," Myers said. "As a result, two out of every five deaths in Indian Country are due to smoking; that's 40%."

## The health effects of second-hand smoke

More than 50,000 people die annually from exposure to environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) i.e. second-hand smoke. An estimated 3,800 of these deaths are from lung cancer, 38,000 from circulatory and heart diseases. Second-hand smoke is the third leading preventable cause of death.

Cigarette smoke contains 42 known carcinogens, including nicotine, benzene, formaldehyde, cyanide and other deadly chemicals. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is recommending that second-hand smoke be classified as a Group A carcinogen, the highest and most dangerous classification.

Physical separation of smokers from nonsmoker in workplaces, restaurants and recreation halls does not prevent involuntary exposure to harmful amounts of ETS.

Nonsmokers who live with smokers suffer a 30% higher incidence of lung cancer than those living with nonsmokers.

The risk of lung cancer to nonsmokers growing up as children of smoking parents is double that of nonsmoking adults who grew up with nonsmoking parents.

Ninety-five percent of adult Americans believe that cigarette smoking is harmful to health.