

Atmosphere of fear over herpes doesn't help the afflicted

By Craig Picchura
staff writer

You can't get it from a toilet seat or by slipping wise from a chalice in church. The "it" being herpes, a viral disease that is growing as fast as the fallacies surrounding it.

Estimates vary widely on the number of Americans who have herpes type 1 (usually the oral infection) and herpes type 2 (usually manifested by genital blisters). Incidents of herpes aren't automatically reported to government health authorities as are such communicable diseases as measles, syphilis and gonorrhea because no treatment currently exists for controlling the viral infection.

THE REASONING is: Why spend federal money compiling numbers that inevitably will be incomplete on an incurable disease?

However, using statistical samples from selected venereal disease clinics in the country, the national Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta estimates between 300,000 to 500,000 new cases of genital herpes are occurring each year in the U.S.

The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIID) estimates that 5 million Americans have genital herpes but other educated guesses peg the number at four times that amount.

Figures for oral herpes — usually called fever blisters or cold sores — are much higher.

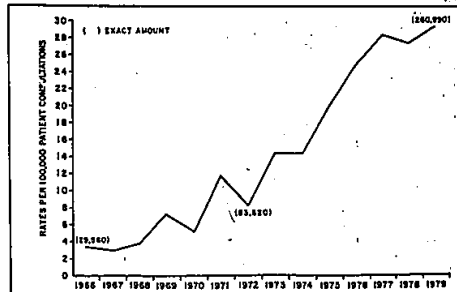
Physicians say the best advice for herpes sufferers is keep the infected area dry because moisture retards healing. At Botsford Hospital in Farmington Hills, health officials recommend drying the infected area with a blow-dry hairdryer after bathing.

from an infected patient's mouth or throat.

The herpes virus isn't airborne. It enters the body through a break in the skin or through mucous membranes found in the mouth and sexual organs for the rest of the host's life in nerve cells, not the blood system.

The first outbreak generally is the most painful and lasts the longest — about three weeks. Victims of genital herpes notice an itching or burning sensation in their genital area and women often a vaginal discharge. Within a week a cluster of small, painful blisters usually appear. The sores form a crust that sheds without scarring.

RECURRENTS are usually much milder, according to CDC researchers, and the sores heal faster than the primary infection period. Women rarely get blisters on their cervix in subsequent outbreaks which occur on the average of about four times per year for a week's duration each time and can be triggered by emotional stress, sexual



*Data Source: IMS America, NDTI.

This graph prepared by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services shows nine times more people consulting with private physicians about problems with genital herpes between 1960 and 1979 — a meteoric rise of epidemic proportions.

intercourse, menstruation or any number of factors. Pregnant women should be especially cautious because newborn babies can contract the disease during delivery if the disease is active in the mother.

RELIEF is limited but good hygiene helps. Bathing the infected area frequently and washing with soap, Bu-

Please turn to Page 4

Genital herpes myths debunked

Editor's Note: The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, a division of the National Institute of Health, has compiled a list of questions and answers frequently asked about genital and oral herpes simplex viruses. Excerpts from the department's fact sheet follow:

Q. How many strains of herpes simplex virus exist?

A. There are two closely related herpes simplex viruses — type 1 and type 2 — and many strains of those two types.

Q. What other conditions are caused by herpes simplex viruses?

A. Cold sores or oral herpes refers to infections of the lips, tongue or mouth that are caused by herpes simplex viruses. Ocular herpes occurs when herpes simplex virus infects the eyes. Herpes encephalitis is a serious, but infrequent, herpes simplex infection of the brain and spinal cord. Rarely, newborn babies may develop a severe form of herpes infection if born through an infected birth canal or infected soon after birth.

Q. What are the symptoms of genital herpes?

A. Itching or pain in the genital area, a burning sensation when urinating or a vaginal discharge. Usually

within a week small and painful blisters appear on the vagina, cervix, urethra or anal area in women and on the penis or around the anus in men. The sores become crusty and heal without scarring. Local swelling and flu-like symptoms (such as fever, sore throat, and headache) may also be present.

Q. Can a person have genital herpes and not have any symptoms?

A. Yes. Some infections can occur without symptoms or the symptoms are so mild they go undetected.

Q. Are the symptoms the same in recurrent herpes?

A. The signs and symptoms may be similar to those in the first infection but not necessarily the same. Several hours before the blisters appear, many patients experience what are called prodromal symptoms — shooting pain running down the buttocks or in the knees or itching in the genital area. For some persons, these warning signs are the most painful part of the recurrence.

Q. When are herpes infections contagious?

A. When the blisters are present or when the virus is in the genital area, a burning sensation when urinating or a vaginal discharge. Usually

"It can be stated with some assurance that at least one-third of the world's population at this very moment has been infected with HSV-1 (herpes simplex virus type 1)," says Dr. Andre J. Nahmias, M.D., writing in the New England Journal of Medicine. Nahmias is considered an international expert in herpes research and is a frequent contributor to the CDC as a member of the Emory University Medical School.

WHILE EVEN the most conservative figures point to evidence of a national herpes epidemic, the recent spate of newspaper, magazine and television reports on the subject may have created an unwarranted atmosphere of fear — bordering on paranoia — in the minds of some, say several health care professionals.

"At least once every other week I'd say someone asks me if they can get herpes from a toilet seat," says Mary Sugrue, R.N., who works in the infection control office at Farmington Hills' Botsford Hospital. "And these questions come from nurses, college graduates, someone you'd expect to be a little more educated on the subject."

National authorities on the incurable disease agree with Sugrue's assessment saying skin-to-skin contact is required to transmit herpes virus.

HOWEVER, HERPES isn't spread exclusively by sexual contact. Young children can contract oral herpes from a parent's loving kiss or a child's intimate contact with a playmate with a cold sore. Hospital personnel and dentists can contract herpes infection of the fingers — called Herpetic Whitlow — by coming in contact with saliva

Help available

Psychological hurt worst

By Craig Picchura
staff writer

Having any kind of incurable disease is a difficult thing to confront but even more so if the disease is acquired sexually.

"People can be sexually active and still get very upset when something happens to their genitals," says John Graves, associate director of the Herpes Resource Center. "It's a rare person who doesn't get emotionally upset when they find something is wrong."

For that reason, the American Social Health Organization formed a national network of support groups for persons infected with incurable genital herpes.

In the metropolitan Detroit area, the support group is known as the Metro Detroit HELP Chapter and can be reached at P.O. Box 492, Dearborn Heights, Mich. 48127.

A Herpes Crisis Hotline can be reached by calling Edna Mather, RN, at 676-4200, ext. 3380. The support



Photos courtesy Centers for Disease Control

A child's hand infected by herpes simplex virus shows evidence of painful sores or lesions.

Please turn to Page 6

science scrapbook

WELCOME TO THE FIRST Edition of Science Scrapbook. This new feature will appear monthly along with our science page. Data for this section is compiled by Farmington Observer staff member Randy Borst who is an avid science enthusiast. Of course we welcome contributions from the public.

THE NEWEST American airliner, the Boeing 767, can be seen at Detroit Metro Airport as it makes its daily runs between Chicago and Detroit.

The 767 represents the latest in civilian jet technology with quieter, more fuel-efficient engines, a larger passenger cabin and an improved instrument landing system. The twin-engine craft is Boeing's replacement for its 737 which has been in service almost 20 years. The new transport will be used on short-haul flights within the United States.

If you would like to take a look at the new plane, stop by the United Airlines terminal at Metro Airport around 5 p.m. any day of the week. The flight will be getting ready to leave for Chicago at 5:40 p.m.

PURCHASING SPARE engines for its fleet of six Concorde proved to be too costly for British Airways. It decided to use the engines from one of the planes already in service. One of the supersonic transports had all four Olympus 593 turbojets removed to be used as spares for the remainder of the fleet. The engines, manufactured by Rolls Royce, power the SST to speeds of Mach 2 (about 1,400 mph). The cannibalized Concorde is parked at London's Heathrow airport.

SO YOU'VE NOTICED.

The dew is covering your car windshield already, and soon that morning dew will change into morning frost. So the next time you're cursing old man winter, think about how it all happens.

The atmosphere contains large amounts of water vapor. How much water the air can hold at a

given temperature is called the relative humidity. The sun heats the air and the ground during the day. But at night that heat is lost through a radiation process.

As the ground cools, it lowers the temperature of surrounding air, causing a humidity increase. When the air is holding all the water it can (called saturation), it reaches its "dew" point.

If the air temperature continues to decrease, the excess water will begin to condense on surrounding objects that are cooler than the air.

A large amount of dew collects on your car during the night because the auto's steel radiates a great amount of heat. Other objects, radiating less heat, attract less dew. If the ground temperature falls below the freezing point (32 degrees Fahrenheit) and water condenses from the atmosphere, frost is likely to form.

Both dew and frost are more likely to form on clear nights when clouds are not helping to hold heat close to the earth.

OCTOBER ALWAYS will be remembered by millions of Americans as the genesis of the age of space exploration. This month marks the era's 25th anniversary. On Oct. 1, 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik 1 into earth orbit. The satellite was less than two feet in diameter and burned up in the atmosphere three months after launch.

Despite its small size and short life, the craft altered the world's future in numerous ways. In the 25 years that followed, 12 Americans walked on the moon. Spacecraft from the United States and the Soviet Union explored nearly all the planets in the solar system. Only Uranus, Neptune and Pluto have not been visited.

In recent years, the main thrust of the Soviet space program has been to establish permanently manned space stations in earth orbit. The U.S. has concentrated on reusable spacecraft such as the Space Shuttle. That craft is due to make its next flight in November.

THE PLANET MERCURY passed between the Earth and the Sun on Oct. 1, in case you hadn't noticed. It's heading toward its point of greatest elongation on the 17th of this month. Star gazers will be able to see it as a morning star during the middle of the month.

While you're watching, remember that Mercury is the smallest planet in the solar system (3,000 miles in diameter) and also the closest to the Sun (36 million miles). It was visited by an American spacecraft on March 29, 1974. During the fly-by, Mariner 10 sent back hundreds of photographs of the rocky, cratered surface of that planet.

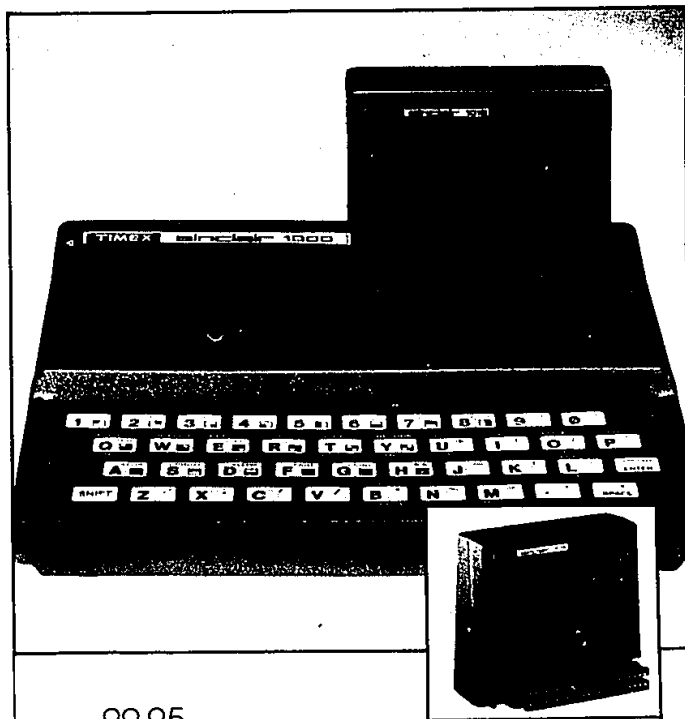
Mercury will appear as a fairly bright, point-of-light low on the eastern horizon about an hour before sunrise around Oct. 17. This will be one of the best times to view the planet this year.

WE'RE IN STORE for some spectacular sunsets, thanks to a volcano on the western coast of Mexico which erupted last spring. The particles of volcanic dust and ash were blown high into the stratosphere and will continue to circulate in the upper atmosphere for several years.

Dust is always present, to some extent, in the atmosphere, so a red sunset or sunrise is common. But when a large amount of dust and ash, such as that generated by a volcano or forest fire, begins to circulate, it can make for some dramatic sky colors.

The reason is simple:

When the sun is low on the horizon, the light must travel through a denser part of the atmosphere than when directly overhead. The concentration of dust and ash at the horizon allows the red portion of the sun's spectrum to pass more easily than the other colors, thereby causing the brilliant orange and red sunsets seen this summer. However, when the sun is high in the sky, the light travels through a thinner layer of air. Because the amount of dust is less concentrated at this point, blue light scatters in the atmosphere and results in the familiar blue sky.



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