

# Houston Health

Summer 2002  
Houston Department of  
Health and Human Services



*A Quarterly Newsletter for Advisory Councils of the Houston Department of Health and Human Services*

## Task force to aim HIV/AIDS campaign at Hispanics

Hispanics in Houston and Harris County represent 16 percent of the 5,053 HIV infections reported to the Houston Department of Health and Human Services (HDHHS) during the last three years.

Hispanics also make up 15 percent of the 19,427 local AIDS cases reported to the department since the start of the epidemic in 1981. And last year, area Hispanics accounted for 25 percent of all AIDS diagnoses, surpassing for the first time the percentage for the white – non Hispanic – population of 22 percent.

The department's Bureau of HIV/STD Prevention convened the Latino HIV Task Force, a group comprised of representatives from mostly health agencies and community-based organizations providing services to the Hispanic community. The task force is charged with helping increase education and awareness of HIV, AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) among Hispanics, who, according to 2000 Census figures, make up 37.4 percent of the Houston population and constitute the fastest-growing ethnic group in the city.

"It is critical for us to enlist in the task force as many of the local Hispanic HIV/AIDS and STD organizations and groups as possible," said Glenda Gardner, Chief, Bureau of HIV/STD Prevention. "They have been our partners in past endeavors



in the fight against HIV and STDs. Bringing all of them together for this task force ensures the collaboration needed to develop the most culturally-sensitive and efficient interventions for the various at-risk populations within the local Hispanic community."

Other goals of the task force are to increase private and public partnerships as a way of boosting the involvement of community leaders, corporate entities and local celebrities

and expand resources and activities targeting Hispanics. Another goal is to augment the education of medical care providers to ensure rapid referral of HIV-positive people to early intervention programs and appropriate medical services.

Top priority for the task force is reducing HIV and AIDS diagnoses among Hispanics by targeting prevention messages to those most at risk within that population, men who

*see Hispanics, Page 2*

**Health  
Observances**  
...Page 3

**Staying Safe  
Around Dogs**  
...Page 4



**Senior Citizens and  
Heat-Related Illnesses**  
...Page 5

# Hispanics at high risk priority for HIV task force

continued from Page 1

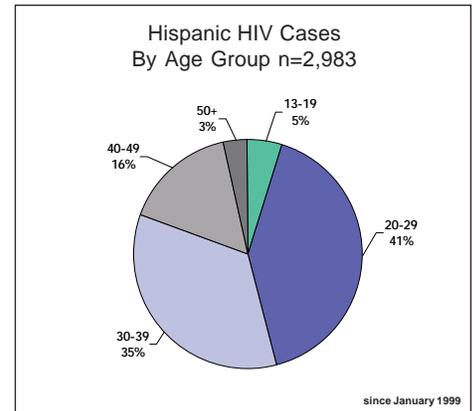
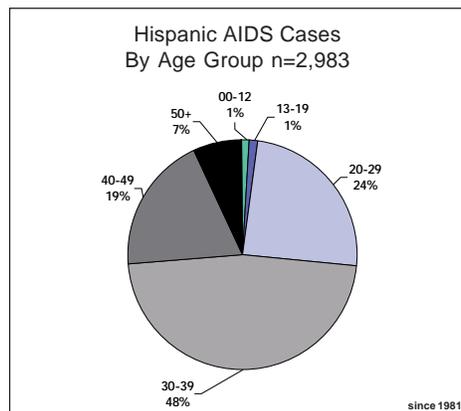
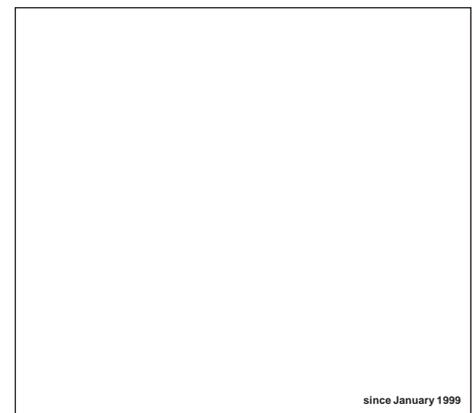
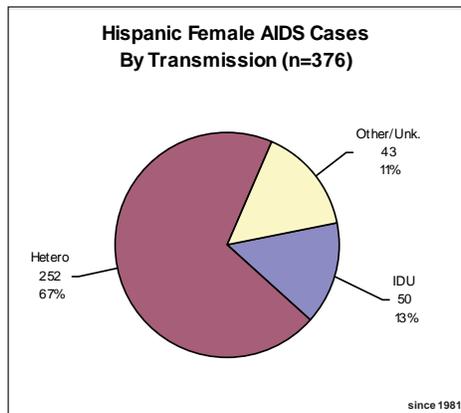
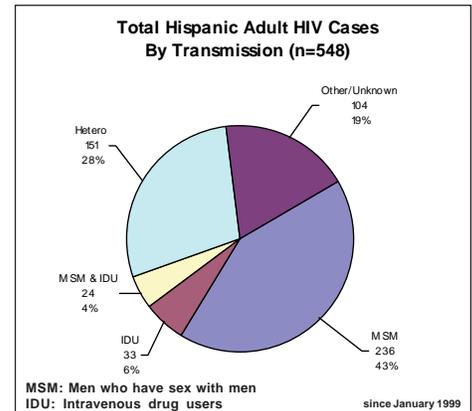
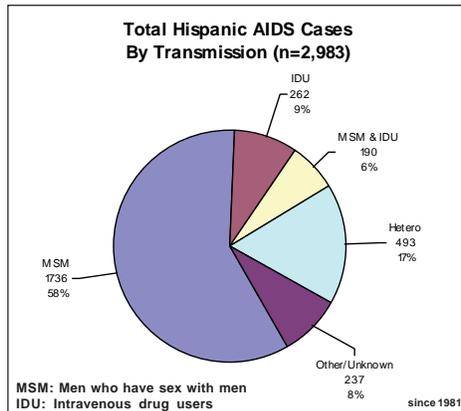
have sex with men (MSM) and heterosexual women, especially those between 20 and 39 years of age.

Among Hispanics, statistics compiled by HDHHS show 548 HIV infections reported during the last three years and 2,983 AIDS cases reported from 1981 through June of this year. Hispanic men who have sex with men transmitted 43 percent of the HIV infections and 58 percent of the AIDS cases. Among Hispanic women, 73 percent of the 143 HIV infections and 67 percent of the 376 AIDS cases were contracted through heterosexual contact.

As with other ethnic groups, young Hispanic adults comprise a majority of those diagnosed with HIV. Forty-one percent of the HIV cases reported to the department were in the 20 to 29 year age group and 35 percent in those in the 30 to 39 year age group. Also, people between 30 and 39 years of age represent 48 percent of the AIDS cases among Hispanics, followed by those between 20 and 29 years of age at 24 percent.

Agencies and Hispanic community-based organizations already on the task force are the AIDS Foundation Houston, Amigos Volunteers in Education and Services (AVES), Association for the Advancement of Mexican Americans (AAMA), Community Family Centers, Fundación Latino Americana Contra el Sida (FLAS), Harris County Hospital District, Houston Area Community Services (HACS), Montrose Clinic, Texas Children's Hospital and The Life Center. Each of the organizations administers established HIV and AIDS prevention programs or offers medical treatment.

HDHHS provides HIV testing through family planning and maternity clinics at all its health centers and HIV counseling and testing at four



STD clinics, three of them at health centers and the fourth in the Texas Medical Center. It also offers case management for HIV-infected men, women, children and families. The responsibility for leading the department's prevention efforts rests with the Bureau of HIV/STD Prevention.

The Bureau of HIV/STD Prevention coordinates an array of initiatives and community outreach activities. It distributes grants to community-based organizations that develop innovative

prevention activities aimed at reducing HIV and STD transmission in different segments of the city's population. In fiscal year 2002, HDHHS awarded five organizations targeting the Hispanic community \$699,197, representing approximately 26 percent of the \$2.6 million disbursed to local agencies.

The Bureau of HIV/STD Prevention uses an HIV mobile unit – a customized 40-foot truck – to take its  
*see Bureau, Page 3*

## Bureau leads department's HIV prevention efforts

*continued from Page 1*

education, counseling, and testing services directly to the community, especially high-risk or hard-to-reach populations. Bureau employees staffing the mobile unit are able to provide confidential testing for HIV, syphilis and chlamydia.

The Bureau of HIV/STD Prevention also administers the Medical

Center STD clinic, located at 1115 S. Braeswood. The clinic offers counseling and testing for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Staff members with the bureau's Perinatal HIV Prevention Program provide case management services to HIV-positive women of childbearing age and women at high risk of HIV infection.

### Q&A: HIV, AIDS

pregnancy or delivery, as well as through breast feeding.

#### What body fluids transmit HIV?

Blood, semen, vaginal fluid and breast milk.

#### How does HIV cause AIDS?

HIV destroys a certain kind of blood cell—CD4+ T cells (helper cells)—crucial to the normal function of the human immune system. In fact, loss of these cells in people with HIV is an extremely powerful predictor of the development of AIDS. Studies have revealed that most people

The bureau serves as the facilitator for the Houston HIV Prevention Community Planning Group, charged with developing a comprehensive prevention plan that addresses the HIV epidemic at the local level.

For more information about the task force or to become a member, call the bureau at 713-794-2991.

infected with HIV carry the virus for years before enough damage is done to the immune system for AIDS to develop. However, recently developed sensitive tests have shown a strong connection between the amount of HIV in the blood, the decline in CD4+ T cell numbers and the development of AIDS. Reducing the amount of virus in the body with anti-HIV drugs can slow this immune destruction.

*Source: Centers for Disease Control & Prevention*

### What is AIDS?

AIDS stands for acquired immunodeficiency syndrome. A diagnosis of AIDS is made by a physician using certain clinical or laboratory standards.

### What causes AIDS?

AIDS is caused by infection with a virus called human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). This virus is passed from one person to another through blood-to-blood and sexual contact. In addition, infected pregnant women can pass HIV to their babies during

## Calendar

### AUGUST

#### **Cataract Awareness Month**

American Academy of Ophthalmology  
www.eyenet.org

#### **National Immunization Awareness Month**

National Partnership for Immunization  
http://www.partnersforimmunization.org

1-7

#### **World Breastfeeding Week**

World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action and La Leche League International  
www.lalecheleague.org

### SEPTEMBER

#### **Cold and Flu Campaign**

American Lung Association  
www.lungusa.org

#### **Healthy Aging Month**

Educational Television Network, Inc.  
www.healthyaging.net

#### **Children's Eye Health and Safety Month**

Prevent Blindness America  
www.preventblindness.org

#### **National Food Safety Education Month**

International Food Safety Council  
National Restaurant Association  
Education Foundation  
www.nraef.org/ifsc

#### **National Cholesterol Education Month**

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute  
Information Center  
www.nhlbi.nih.gov

#### **National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month**

Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration  
Center for Substance Abuse Treatment  
www.health.org/recoverymonth/

9-15

#### **National 5 A Day Week**

National Cancer Institute and Produce  
for Better Health Foundation  
www.5aday.gov

16-22

#### **National Reye's Syndrome Week**

National Reye's Syndrome Foundation  
www.reyessyndrome.org

15-21

#### **National Rehabilitation Week**

National Rehabilitation Awareness  
Foundation  
www.nraf-rehabnet.org

23-30

#### **Ulcer Awareness Week**

Centers for Disease Control and  
Prevention  
www.cdc.gov

## Following safety tips help reduce risk of dog bites

Dogs offer their owners wonderful companionship.

Still, knowing how to stay safe around dogs is important because even the sweetest puppy will bite if provoked or if it feels uneasy around people and other animals.

A majority of the animal bite investigations conducted by the Bureau of Animal Regulation and Care (BARC) at the Houston Department of Health and Human Services involve incidents with dogs.

In fiscal year 2001, 1,828 of the 2,836 bite investigations performed by animal control officers with BARC involved dogs. Dog bite investigations during fiscal year 2000 amounted to 2,045 of the 2,784 total.

The remainder of the bite investigations involved cats, 295 in 2001 and 339 in 2000, and other wildlife such as bats or skunks, 483 in 2001 and 182 in 2000.

One of the most important recommendations is to avoid approaching unfamiliar dogs. Permission to pet an unfamiliar dog must be sought from the owner before petting it.

If approached by an unknown dog, the chances of being attacked



diminish if the person stays still until the dog leaves or backs away slowly until the dog is out of sight, avoids eye contact and remains calm. Dogs naturally love to chase and catch things so running away will only give them a reason to become excited or aggressive. If knocked down or in case of a fall, a person should curl into a ball and place hands over the head and neck in a way that protects the face.

Other safety tips to stay safe around dogs are:

- do not tease a dog,
- do not surprise or touch a sleeping dog,

- do not turn your back on a dog,
- do not bother a dog while it is eating,
- do not leave small children alone with a dog, and
- do not stare into a dog's eyes.

If a dog bites or scratches a person, wash the wound with warm, soapy water and consult with a doctor. If possible confine the dog without endangering the safety of other people and call BARC at 713-238-9600.

Learning signs of aggressive and fearful behavior in dogs and other animals helps people avoid dangerous

see *Socializing*, Page 5

## List of BARC services, helpful phone numbers

- Investigates reported animal bites
- Vaccinates against rabies
- Licenses dogs and cats
- Places dogs and cats up for adoption
- Shelters lost and stray animals
- Enforces animal ordinances
- Provides educational speakers
- Offers shelter tours

### Helpful Numbers

Report animal bites, scratches or attacks	713-238-9600
Report loose, stray or other animal complaints	713-238-9600
Kennel	713-238-9600
Licenses	713-238-9600
Administration, educational speakers and tours	713-238-2170
Barking dogs (Houston Police Department)	713-222-3131
Citizens for Animal Protection	713-497-0591
Dead animal pickup (Solid Waste Department)	713-699-1113
Free spay/neuter for pets of low-income citizens:	
Spay Neuter Assistance Program (SNAP)	713-522-2337
Lost Pets Hotline	713 247-3874

## Socializing dogs will lessen aggressive behavior

*continued from Page 4*

situations. Signs:

- Ears are erect or back.
- Body is stiff.
- Tail is stiff or moving rapidly.
- Body is crouched with head down.
- Tail hangs down or is tucked between legs.
- Growling.
- Staring straight ahead.
- Hair standing on end.

Most bites occur when owned dogs bite a member of the family. These include children playing with a teething puppy or family members playing aggressive games like wrestling or tug-of-war with an adult dog.

Pet owners can help reduce the chances of a dog biting another person by socializing their dogs. Gradually exposing a puppy to a variety of situations under controlled circumstances will make it feel at ease around people and other animals. The exposure needs to continue on a regular basis throughout the life of a dog to keep it socialized and know how it will react to different situations, large crowds or busy streets.

Owners also can teach a dog such basic commands as “sit,” “stay,” and “come” and at the same time build a bond of obedience and trust between them and their pet.

Dogs need to be vaccinated

against the rabies virus every year. If dogs become infected with the virus, owners could begin seeing changes in the way their pets behave. A friendly dog might want to be alone or a shy dog might want attention. Rabid dogs often become mean, roam, make strange noises and attack people and other animals.

People can become infected with rabies if bitten or scratched by dog with the disease. The disease is fatal to both animals and humans. A person who has been infected with the virus, but who has not yet developed symptoms, may be treated with a series of shots. There is no treatment once an animal or person exhibits symptoms.

## Elderly most at risk of heat-related illnesses

Houston’s sweltering summer months render the elderly particularly vulnerable to heat-related illnesses.

Two local elderly residents already have died this year due to heat-related illnesses. Last summer in Houston and Harris County, senior citizens accounted for 14 of the 20 heat-related deaths reported to the Houston Department of Health and Human Services. A total of 38 heat-related deaths occurred in Harris County in the summer of 2000 and 20 deaths in the summer of 1999.

“The ability to respond to thermal stress, either heat or cold, is impaired in the elderly,” said Dr. Luther Harrell, Chief Physician with the department’s Division of Community and Personal Health Services. “It takes older people almost twice the time of younger people to return to core body temperature after exposure to extreme outdoor temperatures.”

High body temperatures can also lead to damage to the brain or other vital organs.

Harrell recommends that people



visit elderly relatives, friends or neighbors and check them for signs of heat exhaustion or heat stroke. Checking an elderly person’s condition and determining the temperature inside the home is especially important during the hottest parts of the summer.

Heat exhaustion, usually associated with heavy activity, is the body’s response to an excessive loss of water and salt contained in sweat. Signs include profuse sweating,

paleness, muscle cramps, weakness, dizziness, headache, nausea or vomiting, a weak-but-rapid pulse and fainting. The skin may be cool and moist. If heat exhaustion is untreated, it may progress to heat stroke.

Heat stroke occurs when the body’s temperature rises rapidly, the sweating system fails and the body is unable to cool down. Body temperature may rise to 106°F or higher within 10 to 15 minutes. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not given.

Heat stroke symptoms include an extremely high body temperature (above 103°F, orally), red, hot and dry skin (no sweating), rapid and strong pulse, throbbing headache, dizziness, nausea, confusion and unconsciousness.

Others who are particularly vulnerable include infants and children up to four years of age, those who are overweight and people with heart and respiratory problems.

Staying indoors, preferably in an

*see Precautions, Page 6*

## Department to offer vaccinations at four area sites

The Houston Department of Health and Human Services will provide immunizations to children at four area sites weekdays from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. through August 16.

Sites and their addresses are:

**Northwest Mall,**  
9800 Hempstead Highway  
**Northline Mall,**  
4400 North Freeway  
**Sharpstown Center,**  
7500 Bellaire Boulevard  
**Houston C.U.P. Center,**  
149 Winkler

A designated number of appointment tickets will be issued daily at each of the sites. The tickets will be distributed on a first come, first served basis and based on site capacity. Parents should take to the

## Precautions can keep heat-related illnesses at bay

*continued from Page 5*

air-conditioned home or building such as a library, shopping mall or multi-service center, is the best protection against the heat. Electric fans may provide comfort, but when the temperature is in the 90s, fans without refrigerated air only spur the movement of hot humid air, which will accelerate body heating and raise internal body temperature. Taking a cool shower or bath or moving to an air-conditioned place is a much better way to cool off.

To avoid heat-related illness:

vaccination site their children's immunization records and Medicaid card if applicable.

Vaccines most frequently needed by children before going to school are a combined shot for diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (whooping cough) and another for measles, mumps and rubella.

Children are unable to complete the school registration process until they have met all immunization requirements.

Shots cost \$3 per child.

The department's health centers and regular Monday through Friday

- Increase water consumption. Drink lots of liquids even before getting thirsty, but avoid those with caffeine, alcohol or large amounts of sugar because these can actually result in the loss of body fluid.
- Conduct outdoor work or exercise in the early morning or evening when it is cooler. Outdoor workers should drink plenty of water or electrolyte-replacement beverages and take frequent breaks in the shade or in an air-conditioned facility. Those unaccustomed to working or exercising in a hot environment need



mobile sites will not provide immunizations while shots are offered at the four area sites. Regular Saturday sites will provide immunizations.

For more information, call the department's Immunization Bureau at 713-794-9267.

to start slowly and gradually increase heat exposure over the weeks.

- Wear light-colored, loose fitting clothing that permits the evaporation of perspiration.
- Avoid direct sunlight; seek shade when available.
- A wide-brimmed hat helps prevent sunburn as well as heat-related illness. Sunscreen also protects from the sun's harmful rays and reduces the risk of sunburn.
- If the house is not air-conditioned, seek accommodations in air-conditioned facilities during the heat of the day: malls, movie theaters, libraries, multi-service centers, etc.
- Take frequent cool baths or showers.
- Never leave a person or a pet inside a closed, parked car during hot weather.
- Stay alert to heat advisories.

The National Weather Service issues a heat emergency advisory when the heat index, a computation of the air temperature and humidity, reaches 108 degrees on two consecutive days.

### Houston Health Newsletter

is published quarterly by the



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