

Number of VD cases increasing in Brazos Valley

By JAN PERRY
Reporter

Reported cases of venereal diseases increased more rapidly in Brazos County than they did in the rest of the state last year, according to the State Department of Health.

In Brazos County, reported syphilis increased 20 percent (from 74 to 89 cases) and a reported gonorrhea increased 7 percent (from 366 to 427 cases). In Texas, reported syphilis cases increased 9 percent (from 11,182 to 12,210) and reported gonorrhea decreased 6 percent (from 81,580 to 76,903) from 1982 to 1983.

That is not surprising, since Bryan and College Station are two of the state's fastest growing areas. But the local and state increases parallel increases in reported venereal diseases from across the nation. The word "epidemic" is being used to describe the VD problem.

Some types of VD can be cured; others stay with their victim forever. But two local health-care experts say early diagnosis and treatment offer the best chance for the individuals with VD to return to a normal lifestyle.

Still, the dilemma prevails. The social stigma involved in seeking medical care is still a problem for some members of society.

Dr. Claude B. Goswick, director of the A.P. Beutel Health Center, said the problem with most sexually transmitted diseases is that if they are allowed to go untreated for long, the after-effects are worse than the actual disease.

The five major sexually transmitted diseases are herpes, gonorrhea, syphilis, chlamydia and hepatitis.

He said early diagnosis and treatment make a quick recovery more likely. People who think they have been exposed to the diseases should be aware of the symptoms, Goswick said. Once the symptoms appear, the individual must seek treatment immediately, he said.

In some cases the symptoms of venereal diseases vary slightly among individuals, Goswick said.

The symptoms for genital herpes in most individuals generally are:

- Burning, itching or tingling sensation in the groin.
- Varying numbers of blister-like bumps appearing on or near the genitals.
- Blisters that soon rupture and become ulcer-like sores.

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- Enlarged lymph nodes in the groin.
- Fever.
- Fatigue.
- Headache.

Goswick said there are three noticeable diseases called herpes — herpes simplex (fever blisters), herpes zoster (chicken pox and shingles), and herpes progenitalis (herpes of the genitals).

He said herpes progenitalis is primarily spread by sexual contact when the individual is infectious — when the blisters are present. When the blisters are no longer present the virus lies dormant for an indefinite period and can reappear later.

"Herpes is unpredictable," Goswick said. "The acute phases may not reappear for a month, a year or never. You just don't know."

It is unlikely that a person can contract herpes from an inanimate object, such as toilet seats or door knobs.

"The herpes virus does not survive under dry conditions," Goswick said. However, he said, if your roommates or relatives have herpes, you probably should be careful not to borrow their clothes or towels — just as a precautionary measure.

There is no known cure for herpes. Goswick said several treatments, usually ointments, are available to relieve discomfort. He said research is under

way now to develop a remedy in pill form.

"The disease just has to run its course," he said. "It's very painful."

Sally Miller, clinic coordinator for Planned Parenthood of Brazos County, said herpes is diagnosed by performing tissue cultures of the blisters and by observing the sores. The clinic also tries to find out from whom the disease could have been contracted. She said counseling for emotional support is also a major part of the treatment of herpes.

Miller said pregnant women who have had herpes present a potential hazard to their unborn child. The woman must take precautions to ensure the safety of her child. Her doctor must be made aware of her history of herpes so a cesarean delivery can be performed if the blisters reappear.

"The woman must be aware of her condition and communicate the possibility of herpes being present at the time of delivery to her doctor," Miller said. "It does not mean that a woman with herpes can never deliver."

If an active herpes blister is present on or near the woman's birth canal, the child will be exposed to the virus. The survival

rate of newborn children exposed to herpes is low, Miller said. Those children who survive will probably be retarded or blind.

Women who have contracted syphilis or gonorrhea while pregnant also present a risk to their children, Miller said.

"Infants born to women with syphilis become very ill," Miller said. They can be born with a heart defect, bone deformity or other damage that may appear later in childhood.

It is now standard practice for the physician to give a blood test to the newborn to determine if the child has syphilis. The child is also treated with eye drops at birth to prevent blindness due to gonorrhea, Miller said.

Gonorrhea presents a special problem to newborns and others because its symptoms in women are difficult to detect. They often go unnoticed, so the infection is easily spread to others.

A female with gonorrhea displays the following symptoms:

- Burning sensation when urinating.
- Increased vaginal discharge.
- Fever.
- Stomach pain.

The symptoms for a male with gonorrhea are:

- A burning sensation when urinating.
- Discharge of pus.

Goswick said gonorrhea is treatable in both men and women. If left untreated, gonorrhea can cause sterility or arthritis in males. In females, gonorrhea can cause painful scarring of the Fallopian tubes and ovaries that may later cause infertility and pelvic inflammatory disease. Women with pelvic inflammatory disease from gonorrhea often have premature menopause.

A more serious venereal disease, syphilis, can attack and damage any tissue or organ in the body. The symptoms are:

- Presence of a chancre, which looks like a pimple, blister or open sore.
- Rash over any part of body.
- Bald spots where hair has fallen out.
- Fever.
- Sore throat.
- Splitting headaches.

Many of the signs of syphilis

mimic the symptoms of many other diseases. Only a doctor can determine if they are caused by syphilis.

If left untreated, syphilis goes through several stages, Goswick said. In men and women, syphilis can cause blindness, deafness, paralysis, insanity and death.

Another lesser known sexually transmitted disease is chlamydia (pronounced Kla-mid-ya).

It is twice as common as gonorrhea and often appears at the same time as gonorrhea.

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Italian police fear renewed violence

United Press International
ROME — Police, fearing a renewal of Red Brigades violence, searched for clues Thursday at the suburban villa where gunmen shot and killed the American director-general of the multinational observer force in the Sinai.

Because of the precise planning of the attack against Leamon R. Hunt, one of the most politically important American residents in Rome, the Italian press said it raised the specter of a return of Red Brigades violence in Italy.

Police said a telephoned claim of responsibility by the Combatant Communist Party, a group formed of remnants of the Red Brigades and other Italian left-wing terrorist

groups, appeared to be authentic.

They said the caller described details of the Fiat car the gunmen used in the attack. In addition, Red Brigades hardliners among 35 terrorists currently being tried in Genova repeated their claim to the Hunt slaying in a court outburst Thursday.

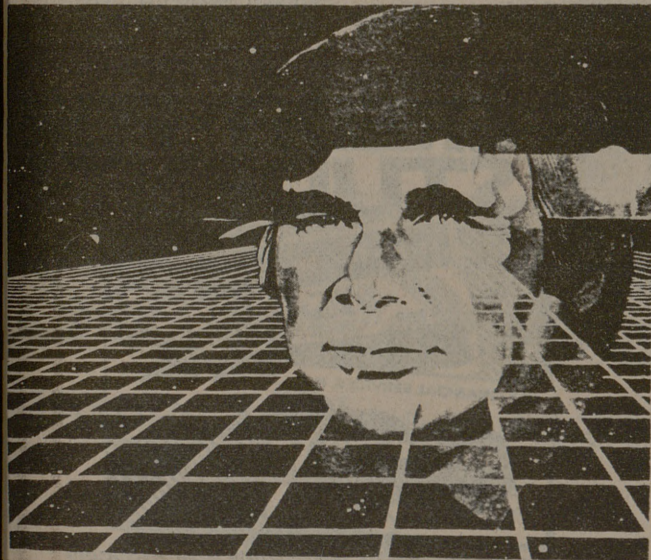
Defendant Mario Seghetti shouted "War on American imperialism" and "Italy out of NATO," slogans also used in the telephone claim by the Combatant group.

Police discounted a rival claim made in Beirut Thursday by an obscure Arab group calling itself the Lebanese Revolutionary Armed Brigade.



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