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# AIDS vaccine fails, raises questions

## Ethnicity may play a role in treatment of the disease

By Paul Elias  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN FRANCISCO — The failure of an experimental AIDS vaccine in its first major test has shattered hopes of developing a shield against infection in the near future and demonstrated just how far scientists are from bringing the deadly virus under control.

Still, the results made public Monday contained an intriguing finding: The vaccine appeared to work well in the small number of blacks who participated. Scientists said more study is needed to draw any conclusions.

The drug's developer, Vaxgen Inc., said that overall there was no meaningful difference in protection between the 3,330 volunteers who received the genetically engineered vaccine and the 1,679 volunteers who received a placebo. All participants were at high risk of contracting the disease through sex.

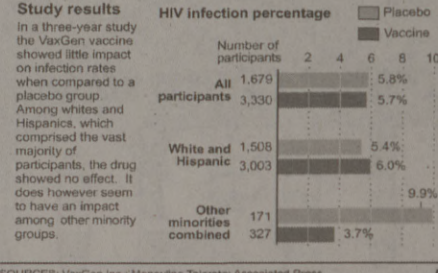
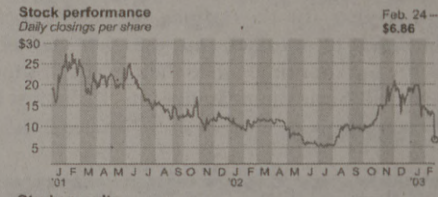
Officials had been willing to give the new drug approval even if it worked on just one in three people.

"The AIDS virus is really wily and mutates easily," said Dr. Tom Coates, director of the AIDS Research Institute at the University of California at San Francisco.

Dozens of companies, universities and researchers are racing to develop their own vaccines. Among them: Merck & Co., GlaxoSmithKline and Aventis Pasteur. But none of those projects is considered as advanced as Vaxgen's.

### AIDS vaccine fails test but still promising

An AIDS vaccine developed by VaxGen Inc. fell short of Food and Drug Administration requirements in clinical trials, causing the company's stock price to plummet.



SOURCES: VaxGen Inc.; Moneyline Telestar; Associated Press

"Given the history of this field, I wouldn't place my money on anything," Coates said. "It's really a very difficult virus to stop."

VaxGen, based in Brisbane, Calif., has spent \$200 million developing its AIDS VAX vaccine and said it remains hopeful the vaccine will someday help slow the spread of AIDS. Results from another big human experiment in Thailand are expected to be released later this year. The Thailand experiment involved intravenous drug abusers.

Company executives conceded doubts that the Food and Drug Administration would approve the vaccine anytime soon.

## Study finds ethnic differences in metabolic syndrome

By Lindsey Tanner  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHICAGO (AP) — A syndrome linked to obesity, diabetes and heart disease is most common among Mexican-American women and least common among black men, a study found.

Metabolic syndrome affects about 22 percent of U.S. adults, or at least 47 million Americans. Symptoms often include high blood pressure, poor cholesterol levels, high blood sugar and a disproportionately large waist.

Researchers analyzed data from a 1988-94 national health survey and found that prevalence ranged from 27 percent of Mexican-American women to 14 percent of black men.

The percentage of black and white women affected was 21 percent and 23 percent respectively. Among men, the rates were 21 percent for Mexican-Americans and 24 percent for whites.

The disparities are probably due to genetics, though there may be some unknown environmental factors that the study did not measure, said Columbia University's Dr. Steven Heymsfield, a co-author.

The ethnic differences remained even after factors including body-mass index, socioeconomic status and physical inactivity — all linked to the syndrome — were considered.

The findings appear in Monday's Archives of Internal Medicine. The study was led by Dr. Yong-Woo Park of

Sungkyunkwan University in Seoul, South Korea. Researchers from Stanford University also participated.

The numbers are "staggering," but the data "are now 8 to 14 years old, and the situation has likely worsened," James Hill and Dr. Daniel Bessesen of the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center said in an accompanying editorial.

The syndrome was present in at least half of obese people studied, more than 20 percent of overweight people and less than 6 percent of normal-weight people. It was most common among smokers and in people age 50 and up.

Those affected are prone to developing obesity, diabetes and heart disease, but diet, exercise and quitting smoking can reduce the risk.

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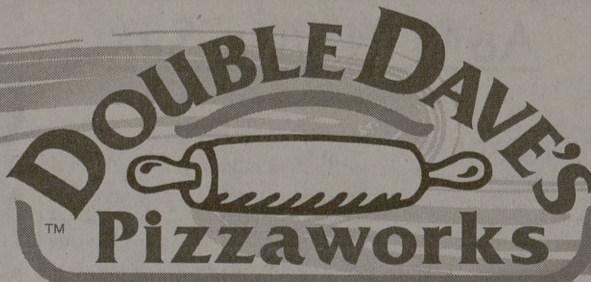
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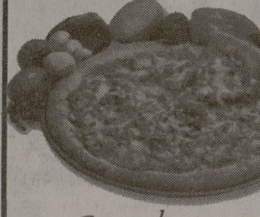
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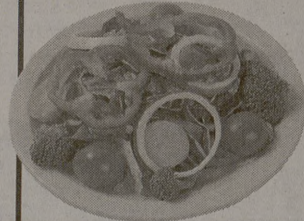
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