

Fear of AIDS virus lower according to poll results

By Will Lester
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON - Fewer people believe the overall threat of AIDS is very serious these days, but a majority of Americans say they worry about the impact of the sexually transmitted disease on the nation's children, an Associated Press poll found.

That decline in fears about AIDS comes at a time the disease is showing signs of making a comeback in the United States.

About six in 10, 61 percent, said they feel AIDS is a "very serious" problem, according to the poll conducted for the AP by Ipsos-Public Affairs. When people were asked in 1987 how serious AIDS was as a national health problem, almost nine in 10 said it was "very serious."

Revolutionary new drugs allow people to live longer with AIDS, and young gay men have no memories of the devastating early days of the sexually transmitted disease two decades ago. Health officials fear complacency could contribute to a comeback of the disease.

Their fears were confirmed a year ago when AIDS diagnoses increased for the first time in a decade.

Only two in 10 polled said they were concerned they would personally be infected with HIV, but more than half, 51 percent, said they were worried that a son or daughter could be infected.

"The way I look at it, kids are going to be kids," said Mike Savicz, a 45-year-old father from Albuquerque, N.M., "like what we did when we were teenagers."

More than six in 10 of those with children said they were concerned that a child might be affected. Even four in 10 of those with no children acknowledged fears about the possibility of a

child being infected, if they had one.

Teaching safe sex should be a high priority to curb AIDS, Savicz said, noting that promoting abstinence is likely to get a cynical reaction from teenagers: "Yeah, yeah, like I'm going to do that."

A majority in the poll, 55 percent, said teaching safe sex should be the focus of efforts to prevent AIDS, rather than promoting abstinence, backed by 40 percent.

The United States provides financial help to developing countries that support President Bush's insistence that abstinence - rather than condoms - should be the main way to prevent the disease.

Americans say they support the \$15 billion the United States has pledged to fight AIDS in developing countries overseas. But when asked whether the money should go abroad or be used to fight the epidemic at home, they choose keeping the money here by a 2-1 margin.

The recent increase in diagnosed cases of AIDS is likely a sign of things to come, said Dr. Jim Curran, dean of the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University and a longtime veteran of AIDS prevention efforts.

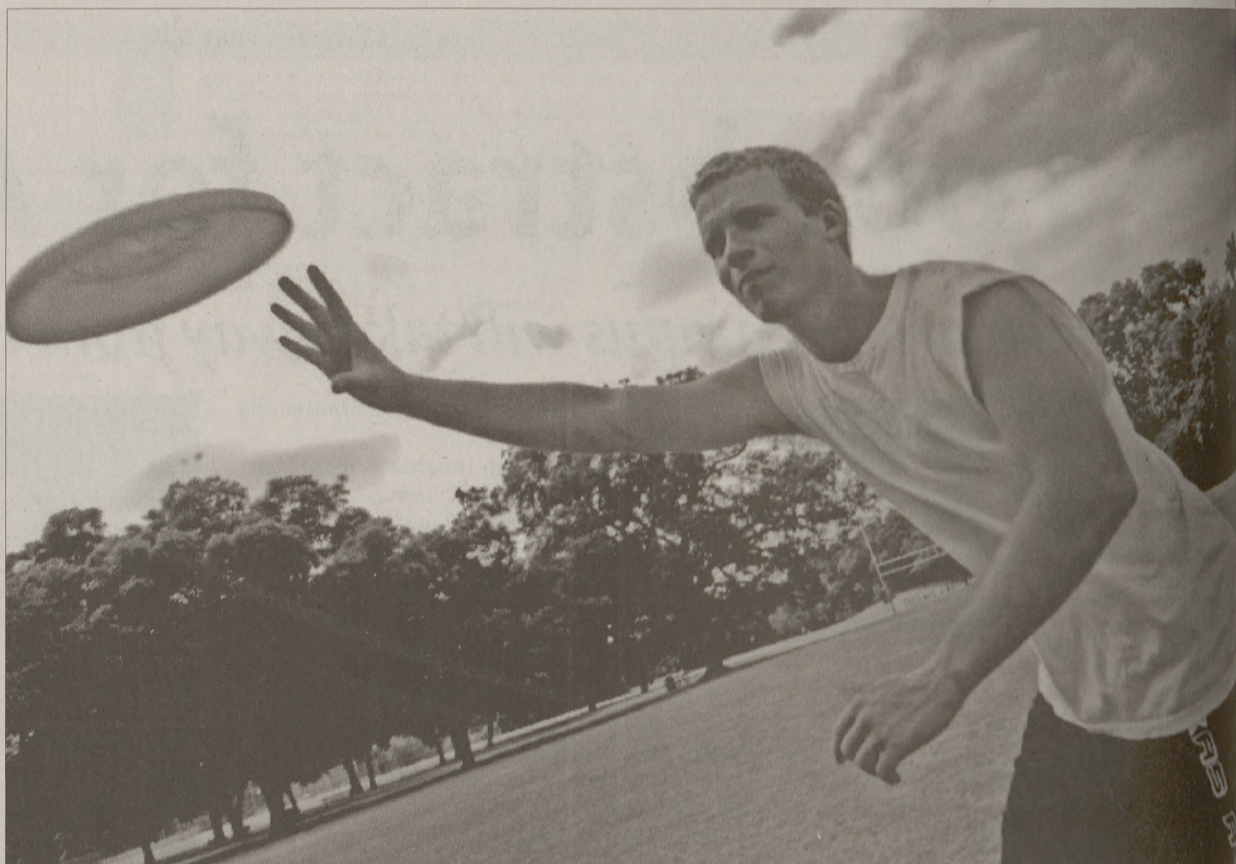
"There are a number of factors that would suggest that AIDS and HIV infections will continue to be on the rise in the United States," Curran said. "There are more people infected than ever, there's a lower death rate, a rise in infection rates among young gay men."

For 23-year-old Heather Sweeney of Philadelphia, AIDS remains a "very serious" problem. Losing a young friend to the disease reinforced that view.

"People are a lot more careless about protection," she said. "A lot more people are having sex younger and they're not as aware of it."

The AP-Ipsos poll of 1,002 adults was taken July 19-21 and has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

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BRIAN WILLS • THE BATTAL

Junior aerospace engineering major **Cole Morrison** catches a Frisbee at Parr Park in Colleyville during a warm-up. **Morrison** plays every Sunday with Mid Cities Bible Church youth group members and other Ultimate Frisbee players

from the Grapevine-Colleyville area. Ultimate Frisbee is gaining popularity in the sporting world; it is played much like football, except a player cannot touch the Frisbee when in possession of the Frisbee.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Thousands search for missing pregnant woman as hope of finding her alive dwindles

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) - Churches canceled meetings and services to allow hundreds of congregants to flood neighborhoods and go door-to-door in search of a missing pregnant woman whose disappearance has baffled friends and neighbors.

More than 3,000 people turned out Sunday to distribute fliers and join the search for Lori Hacking. The turnout was the largest since she vanished last Monday.

Later Sunday, about 200 people attended a candlelight vigil at a park where the woman's car was found and where it had been presumed she disappeared while jogging.

The family has been holding as many as two news conferences a day since the 27-year-old was reported missing. But they have been more reluctant to face reporters since questions arose about the credibility of Hacking's husband, Mark.

"We are all exhausted and we feel we need to concentrate our efforts and our energies on finding Lori," said Thelma Scott, Hacking's mother.

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