

Hollywood, Health & Society (HH&S) is a project of the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center. Funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Cancer Institute, HH&S is a free resource for television writers working on medical and health storylines. For a briefing or consultation please contact us:
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News from the CDC and NCI

Key findings from the country's leading health agencies

Victims of Asthma—A report from the CDC indicates that asthma affects some minority groups at up to twice the rate that it affects whites. This disparity is especially prevalent in urban areas—a recent study showed that as many as 25% of children living in New York's poorest neighborhoods have asthma. Officials estimate that almost half of all homeless children in New York are affected by asthma. (CDC Morbidity & Mortality Weekly, 2/27/04; New York Times, 3/2/04) [Click here for a tip sheet on asthma.](#)

Sex and Prostate Cancer—Although the relationship between sex and prostate cancer has been uncertain for decades, a recent report indicates that frequent sexual activity is probably not a risk factor for prostate cancer. In fact, the study found that some men who engage most frequently in sexual activity are at lower risk for prostate cancer than their less sexually active counterparts. (Journal of the American Medical Association, 4/7/04) [Click here for a tip sheet on prostate cancer.](#)

Another Blow for Smoking—A recent report from the Surgeon General found that smoking causes a substantial number of diseases not previously associated with smoking. Diseases such as stomach, cervix, pancreas and kidney cancer; pneumonia; and cataracts were found to be causally linked with smoking. In addition, smoking was found to contribute to hip fractures, reproductive complications and increased wound infections following surgery (CDC Office of Women's Health, 6/04) [Click here for a tip sheet on smoking.](#)



Health Headlines

Current health trends, studies and issues making headlines

Contaminated Candy—An increase in lead poisoning in kids has drawn attention to candy from Mexico, which has consistently tested high for lead over the past decade. Federal and state records show that although 112 brands of Mexican candy have registered hazardous lead levels since 1994, these products remain on store shelves. Childhood lead poisoning has been linked to various health problems including cognitive impairment, behavioral problems, memory loss, kidney problems and stunted growth. (Orange County Register, 4/25/04) [Click here for a tip sheet on lead poisoning in children.](#)

Life after Breast Cancer—Each year, thousands of women are diagnosed with breast cancer and face the alarming likelihood of becoming infertile after chemotherapy. Researchers, however, have created a healthy embryo in a woman using ovarian tissue removed and frozen before chemotherapy and reinserted afterward, side-stepping the damaging effects of chemotherapy on her fertility. (Washington Post, 3/15/04; New York Times, 3/9/04) [Click here for a tip sheet on breast cancer.](#)

A Pill for HIV Prevention? The CDC, National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the Gates Foundation have begun testing a new drug that could prevent HIV infection. The drug tenofovir, also known as Viread, is already being used to treat people with HIV. If proven effective, the drug could be taken once a day on an ongoing basis to prevent HIV infection. While experts worry that a prevention pill could lead to an increase in high-risk sex or drug use, tenofovir could prove vital in reducing HIV transmission worldwide. (Atlanta Journal-Constitution 2/05/04) [Click here for information on HIV/AIDS.](#)

Real People, Real Lives

Case examples of real people dealing with real health issues

- **Jerome Bailey** has seen better days - he's 30 years old, unemployed and taking care of his brother's six children. On top of this, he hasn't been to the doctor in years. But now he's found a place where he can get free medical advice and checkups: his local barbershop, which offers a free health clinic once a week. During one of his visits, Jerome discovered he had high blood pressure and was told that if he didn't change his lifestyle and get help, he could have a heart attack within two years. Jerome, like many Americans, has benefited from the creative use of local barbershops and beauty salons as sources of health care. (Washington Post, 12/07/03) [Click here for a tip sheet on diet and diseases.](#)

- Obesity began early for 15-year-old **Nanette**, who weighs over 300 pounds. Her mother sent her to a fitness camp last summer, which included a regular schedule of exercise and healthy meals. As a result, Nanette achieved her goal of losing 30 pounds in two months. She's even kept the weight off months after camp. Obesity, which often begins at a young age, claims an estimated 400,000 lives each year and is closing in on tobacco as the leading cause of death in the US. (Los Angeles Times, 3/10/04; Dateline NBC, 3/26/04) [Click here for a fact sheet on obesity.](#)

- **Mary** was in good shape for her age. A 75-year-old cancer survivor, she loved spending time with her family on the weekends. When she was transferred to a nursing home, however, she lost 26 pounds in three weeks, became unable to walk and developed severe bedsores and a urinary tract infection. She died after 79 days of respiratory failure due to malnutrition, Alzheimer's disease and ulcers from bedsores on her left hip and buttocks. Her family was awarded a \$1 million settlement in their wrongful death suit against the nursing home. (Los Angeles Times, 2/18/04) [Click here for information on elder abuse.](#)

- 32-year old **Vanessa** was a successful law student in a happy relationship with her boyfriend. Not long after she graduated, however, she discovered that she was HIV-positive. Her boyfriend confessed that he had been leading a bisexual double-life, and had probably contracted HIV from another man. The rate of men on the "down low" - who lead heterosexual lives but have sex with other men - is becoming an increasing public health concern. (Los Angeles Times, 4/5/04) [Click here for information on HIV and AIDS.](#)

Catch Us If You Can!

June 29th: Writers Guild of America, west panel discussion: "Youth at Risk."

June 30th: [Sentinel for Health Award](#) submission deadline.

[Click](#) for CDC & NCI tip sheets on more health topics.