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Site for sore lips: Herpes and the common canker

By Arnold Hedstrom Reprinted from The Ubyssey by Canadian University Press

Herpes does most damage to the brain.

Its symptoms are paranoia confusion and an urge to rush to the nearest health clinic. It affects mainly the middle and upper classes. Herpes of the brain is spread by magnetic tape, newsprint, and radio waves — the tools of the media.

"There is an epidemic," says a University of Victoria counselling psychologist, "an epidemic of the press."

The press created the North American herpes syndrome and the mass media has used graphic and exaggerated journalism to attract readers. Magazines from *Time* to the San Francisco-based *Mother Jones* have used herpes for cover stories.

Time magazine's August

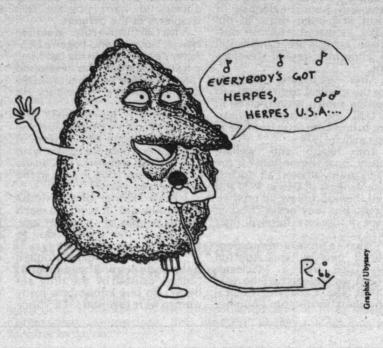
cover story, Today's Scarlet Letter -Herpes, had a noticeable effect on the number of enquiries about the virus at B.C. health clinics. The *Time* article exposed the most horrifying Herpes cases to be found. The result - an alarmed and uninformed public.

At Vancouver's VD clinic, Dr. Hugh Jones says if the clinic sees 20 people a day, two will come in with false herpes alarms.

"The publicity is certainly alarming people," says Jones. "We see about 80 cases a month or about four a day that have Herpes."

The UBC Herpes clinic also had increased numbers of enquiries, especially after the *Time* article, according to herpes researcher Paul Levindusky.

"The general impression we pick up from the media is that there are some really serious consequences and that is not exactly true. Certainly there is an



intimate aspect of their lives - their sex life.

The media exploits people's fears and atitudes concerning sex. With herpes, the most susceptible victims of media exploitation are the upper and middle classes in North America.

"I might venture to say that those in the working class might not be so concerned to present themselves because the effect it has on their lives is not high on their priority lists," Levindusky says.

According to the Herpes Resource Centre in Palo Alto, California, the middle and upper classes are used to having a great deal of control over their lives and herpes to them means a loss of that freedom.

In many third world countries herpes is much more wide spread. Levindusky says in warmer climates and crowded conditions most people will have herpes by the age of 30. going to get worse. Herpes doesn't do that," says Levindusky.

Herpes, as much as it is a physical and psychological affliction, is an attack on society's sexual mores which have changed dramatically since the 1960s.

The *Time* article concluded by stating, "But perhaps not so unhappily, it (herpes) may be a prime mover in helping to bring to a close an era of mindless promiscuity."

For those who do have the virus, at present the only alternative is to continue living - as one does with a cold.

As for preventative media medicine: Rest in bed, read plenty of sources, and take the media with a grain of salt.

Herpes is neither new nor uncommon. The disease's name was coined over 25 centuries ago by Hippocrates and today, in North America, blood tests show that four out of five people have been infected with herpes simplex.

The classic herpes symptoms are an outbreak of blisters around the mouth, vagina, penis or anus, one or two weeks after exposure to the virus.

The blisters erupt and enter a wet-ulcer stage. This is followed over the next several days by drying and scabbing. Some people do not have symptoms at all while others become quite ill.

It is when the symptoms are present the disease may be transmitted, usually, though not exclusively by direct contact.

There are two types of herpes simplex. Herpes symplex I is oral herpes and is transmitted by kissing and mouth contact. Herpes simplex II, genital herpes, is almost always transmitted by sexual contact.

The virus is not transmitted through the air, on toilet seats, or in swimming pools.

Once contacted the virus may cause recurrent outbreaks with

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classes don't live in those conditions so the virus spreads slower. Blood tests of elderly show 80 per cent will have herpes anti-bodies indicating they have contacted the disease.

"All of us can at least expect to get one type of herpes," Levin-

But in the West, the middle some people since the virus ses don't live in those conremains in the body.

But regardless of how one contacts the virus, aside from discomfort and confusion associated with the disease, the risks to well-being are not insurmountable.

ANSPORT "If you understand herpes to be a disease of living, just as you catch colds or catch any of the childhood diseases, then it is not the particularily new disease of the '80s that is being touted in some media presentations." There is some truth in *Time's*

There is some truth in *Time's* report, says Levindusky. But he adds 90 per cent won't have the severe physical and psychological effects reported.

annoyance. People indeed may be sick the first time they contact herpes. Fifty per cent will have a 10 to 14 days period when they are

out there who will never have any symptoms at all," said Levindusky on a CITR radio interview recent-

"There is another 50 per cent

not feeling well.

"This wasn't pointed out in the *Time* article. It left the impression that everyone is suffering from deep psychological scars and have to go to sensitivity training sessions to help them through it."

But partial and selective information is only one way the media exploits its readers. The *Time* article and others play on what most people consider to be an

