

AIDS care costs to hit \$16 billion

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AUSTIN — U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop has predicted that the annual national health bill for AIDS victims will reach \$16 billion by 1991.

Some 54,000 Americans are expected to die from AIDS that year alone, Koop said Thursday.

"If you take all the costs, disruption of services and time lost from employment in 1991, you will see a total bill for America of \$70 billion," Koop said after a speech to a joint session of the Legislature.

By 1991, Koop said, 16,000 of the 270,000 AIDS victims in the United States are expected to be Texans. Some 4,400 Texans will be diagnosed for AIDS that year and some 3,200 will die, he said.

"If you have a monogamous relationship, keep it. If not, find it," the surgeon general warned.

"Not only is this disease doubling every 13 months, it is no longer a disease of certain groups of people that I think most of our population thinks is the case," Koop said, adding:

"It is no longer a disease of white homosexuals or IV (intravenous) drug users, but has jumped into the heterosexual population."

Nationally, he said, heterosexuals make up only 4 percent of all reported AIDS cases, about 1,220 out of 32,900 cases.

"Our statisticians estimate the number of AIDS cases will increase 9-fold over the next five years — and that's a steep curve," Koop said.

"However, they say the number of AIDS cases involving heterosexual people will increase 20-fold — and that's a very steep curve," he added.

Blacks and Hispanics make up a disproportionate share of current AIDS victims, Koop said.

Statistics show one out of eight Americans are black, while one out of four AIDS victims are black, he said.

One out of 12 Americans are Hispanic, while one out of seven Hispanics are AIDS victims, Koop said.

He attributed the disproportionate number of AIDS cases among minorities to a high incidence of intravenous drug use in many inner cities.

Because there is no cure for AIDS, Koop called for either sexual abstinence or monogamy.

He also advocated condom use for any sex outside of monogamy.

Although health and insurance costs are expected to skyrocket, Koop said money alone will not solve the problem.

"You have to have people and dedication and ideas and have a coalition of people willing to get together to get things done," he said.

State Health Commissioner Robert Bernstein has asked for about \$15 million in additional funds over each of the next two years to fund AIDS education, counseling and screening in Texas.

"If we get that money, I will be happy," he said.

Bernstein, asked what would happen if the Texas Health Department failed to gain the funds because of a projected \$4.8 billion budget shortfall

for the upcoming two-year budget cycle, said:

"Somehow, I think people are as important as roads."

Rep. Frank Madia, D-San Antonio, a member of the House Committee on Public Health, said the state at this time does not have the finances to adequately fund the department's request for AIDS education and other prevention programs.

"AIDS is building to an epidemic situation," Madia said, adding:

"I'm not sure the Department of Health has the financial resources allocated to it and none is being suggested to address those areas. We may have some in the next few days, but that's to be seen."

Madia agreed with Koop that re-

sponsible sex education should start at an early age.

"I would imagine that, like anything else, the younger you can teach your child responsibility, the better off you are and the more control you can have over your child's behavior," he said.

The Appropriations Committee is expected to vote soon on a rider to the Health Department's budget to spend \$1.2 million on AIDS education and prevention in fiscal year 1988, and another \$2.2 million in 1989.

Rep. Ciro Rodriguez, D-San Antonio, a member of the House Committee on Public Health, said that other states spend much more.

"The statistics are alarming," Rodriguez said.