

FYI

Precocious Puberty

BY CHERYL CASH
Staff Writer

In a study, led by Dr. Marcia E. Hermans-Giddens of University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, discovered that black girls in the U.S. are beginning puberty by age 8, much earlier than they did in past years. Precocious Puberty is a disorder in children who began sexual development before age 9.

The study revealed that, "Black girls begin puberty shortly before age 9 on average; while white girls begin just before age 10." However, now the study indicates that "before age 8, 27 percent of blacks and almost 7 percent of whites already have begun developing breasts, growing pubic and underarm hair

or both." Why racial difference occurs is unknown.

Herman-Giddens stated that no adequate studies on puberty norms have been done in the United States. "Children who show early signs of sexual development sometimes can get very detailed and expensive medical evaluations to make sure they don't have some serious illness, and it may be that some of the children are being treated unnecessarily. This work could cause standards for such evaluations and treatment to be re-evaluated."

Information from the Mental Health Net on Precocious Puberty says that "Precocious puberty, like normal puberty, results in the appearance of sexual

characteristics. Girls often menstruate and can even ovulate. Boys are affected as well. In boys, the testicles and penis enlarge and pubic, underarm and facial hair appear. Boys experience spontaneous erections and may produce sperms."

Serious questions were raised by the researchers on Herman-Giddens team about environmental estrogens affecting puberty in black girls at an early age. Environmental estrogens are chemicals that mimic the female hormone estrogen. "Environmental estrogens occur from the breakdown of chemicals in products from pesticides to plastic wrap. Products like pomades, marketed to Blacks, use real estrogen," said Dr. Herman-Giddens.

Other causes are "idiopathic," which means no abnormality found and "hypothalamic hamartoma," which is a benign tumor on the part of the brain that releases Luteinizing Hormone Releasing Hormone (LHRH), the hormone that triggers puberty. "Idiopathic precocious puberty is much more common in girls than in boys, while hamartomas are found in both sexes."

According to the study's researchers, an important factor for parents to be more aware of is if children are beginning puberty early, sex education should begin sooner.

Can Teenage Smoking Be Stopped?

BY DAVID W. FULTON
Staff Writer

As a way to fight teenage smoking, The Clinton Administration has proposed measures to significantly reduce the number of children and teenagers who become addicted to cigarettes and smokeless tobacco.

The FDA proposal was published in the Federal Register last Aug. 11, 1996. The deadline for public comment was extended to Jan. 2, 1997.

The measures proposed included: reducing children's easy access to cigarettes by requiring age verification and face-to-face sale; eliminating mail-order sales, free samples, self-service displays, sale of single cigarettes and packages with fewer than 20 cigarettes; banning outdoor advertising within 1,000 feet of schools and playgrounds; permitting black-and-white text only advertising in publications with significant numbers of readers under 18; prohibiting sale of giveaway of products, like caps, that carry cigarette or smokeless tobacco brand names or logos; prohibiting brand-name sponsorship of sporting or entertainment events; and requiring industry to fund a public education program to prevent children from smoking.

The report by the prestigious Institute of Medicine was strong support for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) plan to curb the tobacco industry.

A panel of top scientists urged Congress to allow the government to aggressively regulate tobacco-from capping nicotine to banning cigarette

vending machines - as a way to fight teenage smoking.

The government says more than 400,000 Americans die each year from diseases attributed to smoking and that 70 percent of smokers start smoking before age 18. Anti-smokers and government scientists say as many as 3,000 teenagers a day become regular smokers, hooked on nicotine after experimenting with just a few cigarettes.

The Institute of Medicine spent 18 months studying how to battle teen smoking and concluded that current school education programs and state laws prohibiting tobacco sales to youths simply aren't enough. The scientists said an aggressive plan to reduce teen access to and awareness of tobacco is the only solution. So, the Public Health Service agency (FDA) is strictly regulating tobacco and limiting the nicotine allowed in cigarettes.

The FDA has asked outside scientists to determine at what level nicotine becomes addictive. David Kessler, FDA commissioner, says the plan won't outlaw tobacco. It is a plan to simply say children should be protected from addictive substances.

Congress killed President Clinton's proposed 75-cent cigarette tax increase and would never tolerate a \$2 tax because it would cost 300,000 industry jobs, he said. The Institute of Medicine panel recommended that Congress increase the 24-cent Federal tax on cigarettes to \$2 a pack. Merchants obtain a state license to sell tobacco, which would be suspended if

the store sells tobacco to minors.

Cigarette vending machines be banned. All public places, from restaurants to shopping malls, ban smoking. Federal funds help states conduct "sting" operations to catch stores that sell tobacco to minors."

Several Winston-Salem State University students were asked, "why do they smoke?" They also gave their opinions on the new cigarette license law.

"I feel that in some ways the new smoking law is good because it prevents kids who are underage from smoking. But, those who can smoke legally, I think proper I.D. should be required and that's it." "Some people may think smoking is bad for your health, but for me smoking relieves my stress after a trying day," says Shetika Rogers, 18.

"I started smoking because my friends were and it was cool. It doesn't really bother me until I start running or exercising and I can't breathe. I hope to be able to stop soon," said Kisha Green.

"I feel the new law will not stop teens from buying cigarettes but it may slow down the buying process. Smoking is a stress reliever for me," said Kevin Green, 20.

"Smoking relieves my stress. The new law isn't that effective, but it may slow teenagers from purchasing cigarettes so easily," Darrell Keeling, 20.

Medical Breakthroughs

BY VINCE WOODY
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Medicine is advancing at an ever-alarming rate. The News Argus is introducing a new column that will continue to be featured next school year. The column will contain information on the current medical breakthroughs.

Fertility - At the IVF Institute in Fairfax, Virginia, researchers are successfully forming embryos with the sperm of formerly infertile men. The procedure is called **intracytoplasmic sperm injection**, or ICSI. Ultra-fine glass tubes hold the sperm and the egg. With the assistance of a device that scales down hand movements a thousand times, the embryologist punctures the egg, and releases a single sperm into it. The embryos that develop are transferred to the woman's uterus. At this point, there's about a 20-percent chance the woman will become pregnant.

Multiple Sclerosis - Multiple sclerosis is a breakdown in central nervous system tissues that control physical mobility and movement. In some extreme cases, the disease acts like cancer, causing the immune cells to destroy tissue, so doctors treat it with chemotherapy (lasers). This can destroy stem cells - the building blocks of blood. Now doctors are testing the same technology used to replace those cells in bone marrow transplants. Its