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The new Black view

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Herpes is more common than you think

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Special to the AmNews

Many New Yorkers were shocked at the findings in a Department of Health and Mental Hygiene study released earlier this month that stated that 28 percent of New Yorkers are infected with herpes, an incurable, but not fatal, sexually transmitted disease. The national average is 19 percent. Even more surprising was that the study concluded that about 49 percent of African-Americans in New York are infected with the disease, as compared to 14

percent of the white population. According to the study, about 36 percent of female New Yorkers overall have herpes, while 19 percent of the males are carriers. A staggering 59.7 percent of Black women in the city carry the disease.

While some New Yorkers, especially Black New Yorkers, may find these statistics hard to believe, Dr. Julia Schillinger, one of the authors of the study, noted that the differences in findings for race and gender are actually in line with national studies and

stressed that most people do not even know they are infected.

"Almost 90 percent of the people in our study who have herpes had never been diagnosed as having herpes. The quality of life for most people will not be affected by having herpes. They don't have symptoms, so they are not suffering," Schillinger told AmNews.

The study, conducted in 2004, tested approximately 1,700 non-institutionalized New Yorkers over the age 20. Results showed that more sexual partners increased the

risk of herpes infection.

When asked about the vast difference between Black and white infection rates, Schillinger noted that the study did not research that particular aspect of the findings, but that one plausible theory is sexual networks. A sexual network is the group of people from whom one selects a partner. If a person has a smaller sexual network, there is also at risk for higher infection rates; the end result is increased risk.

Schillinger does not recommend that people go out and

get blood tests unless they have genital sores, are with someone with genital sores, are HIV positive or are in a high-risk group to become HIV positive (i.e., someone who engages in male on male, anal intercourse). Having herpes increases the risk of HIV infection and exacerbates the condition of people who are already HIV positive.

For information on free, confidential clinics near you, call 311 or visit the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's website at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh>.