



Herpes Viruses Association

Registered charity 291657

41 North Road London N7 9DP
Office Tel: 020 7607 9661 Helpline: 0845 123 2305
e-mail: marian@herpes.org.uk

15 April 2008

Metro
Associated Newspapers Ltd, Northcliffe House
2 Derry Street, London
W8 5TT

Dear Sir,

We all want to discourage irresponsible sex and educate our children so that they value themselves and their bodies and do not start having sexual relationships until they are ready but PLEASE can we stop demonising genital herpes like this: "a 12-year-old girl was diagnosed with herpes – an incurable disease which can cause fatal infections in babies born to mothers who have it".

Genital herpes is caused by one of two viruses that may cause facial cold sores or genital herpes. MOST OF US HAVE IT - OFTEN WITHOUT SYMPTOMS SO WE MAY NOT KNOW.(1) It is a skin condition and is seldom of any serious medical importance.(2) The main problem is stigma created and compounded by media pieces like yours. Complications are extremely rare. It hardly ever affects babies.(3)

You are spreading fear and alarm quite unnecessarily. Please stop it. We are given a small grant by the Dept of Health to educate and reassure people about genital herpes. We will never achieve an accurate perception of herpes simplex whilst misinformation is published on the cover of Metro.

Yours sincerely

Marian Nicholson
Director

(1) Seven out of ten adults carry a herpes simplex virus. It is normal to have 'incurable' diseases: chickenpox (herpes varicella) is another "incurable disease which can cause fatal infections in babies" (see note 3) but no one publishes that!

(2) The most likely symptoms when you catch this are: nothing at all. Only one in four who contracts herpes simplex will get diagnosed.

(3) It is babies whose mothers are experiencing their first infection at the time of birth who are affected. The British Paediatric Surveillance Unit reported that amounts to 17 babies a year. Herpes simplex, herpes varicella (chickenpox) and many other viruses can caused problems and miscarriage if contracted (for the first time) in early pregnancy.

Funding from
the Department
of Health

Patrons: Professor Michael W Adler CBE MD FRCP FFCM
Dr David Barlow MA BM FRCP, Dr Elizabeth Claydon MRCP MB ChB
Dr B A Evans FRCP, Dr Colm O'Mahony MD FRCP BSc DIPVen
Dr Miriam Stoppard MD FRCP, Dr David Bull MBBS BSc, Dr Phil Hammond MB BChir MRCP