

Weekly AIDS count may understate disease by as much as 40 percent

BOSTON (AP) — Each Monday, the AIDS Weekly Surveillance Report discloses the toll of the epidemic right down to the last American sick or dead.

Despite the seeming precision, however, the total may underestimate the true scope of AIDS by as much as 40 percent.

The inexorably rising numbers often seem to be a required element of news articles about AIDS. They are cited with morbid exactitude: 40,000-plus have gotten the disease; 1.5 million are already infected; 270,000 will have it by the end of 1991.

But how good are these figures? Can they be believed? The people who compile them seem uneasy with the attention the figures receive.

"There is a fascination with numbers that are not really meaningful," says Dr. Timothy Dondero.

Dondero is chief of AIDS surveillance at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, where the numbers are added up. Experts there say the record-keeping is good and getting better. But precision is elusive.

Even though the weekly total is probably the most reliable AIDS figure available, Dondero says, "The case count, at best, is an index. It's not a precise thing. It is useful for trends."

The total is only as good as the diligence of doctors and hospital workers who report individual cases to state and local health departments across the country.

Mistakes occur.

Sometimes they fail to recognize the disease. Sometimes they forget to send in reports. Sometimes patients are clearly sick, but their symptoms do not precisely fit the formal definition of AIDS. Many reports are somewhere on the bureaucratic journey from the physician's desk to the CDC's computer.

Dr. Meade Morgan, chief of AIDS statistics at the CDC, said the weekly report clearly underestimates the number of cases, and other often-repeated figures, such as the number of people infected, are far less reliable.

"A lot of emphasis is put on the actual numbers," he said in an interview. "People just don't understand how soft they are in a lot of instances."

Each week, the CDC produces 1,600 copies of the five-page surveillance report for state and local health officials. Among the AIDS particulars it contains are the facts that 0.1 percent of AIDS victims live in Alaska, four victims were homosexual hemophiliacs who received blood transfusions and Houston has more AIDS cases than

real number is 50 percent or 30 percent."

Officials estimate that the shortfall roughly breaks down this way: 10 percent of cases are never reported; 15 percent have not fit the precise definition of AIDS; 15 percent have been recognized but haven't reached the CDC's bottom line yet.

"I'm sure AIDS is the best reported of virtually any disease," said Sharon Hopkins, AIDS epidemiologist in King's County, Washington.

The CDC has sponsored reviews of all deaths in several cities to see how many AIDS cases are being missed. The studies suggest that about 90 percent of all AIDS cases are reported.

One of those studies, conducted in Boston, looked for patterns among the cases that were omitted by doctors and hospital infection control specialists.

"There wasn't any systematic failure that we found in the reporting surveillance program," said epidemiologist Jeanne Day of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. "A few of them were due to oversight. They sort of fell through the cracks."

One was missed because the hospital employee who was supposed to report AIDS cases was on vacation. Another wasn't reported because the patient's doctor thought someone else had already sent in the report.

The reporting is usually thorough, even though AIDS frequently is not mentioned as the official cause of death. Day found that in 52 percent of cases surveyed, acquired immune deficiency syndrome was not listed on death certificates. Instead, doctors frequently put down an opportunistic infection, such as pneumonia, that occurred because the AIDS virus had destroyed the patient's immune system.

"The rules on death certificates are that you should write down for the primary diagnosis the underlying disease," said Dr. Jeffrey E. Harris of Massachusetts General Hospital. "Otherwise, everybody's cause of death would be that their heart stopped."

Other followup studies have shown that between 10 percent and 15 percent of cases are not reported because the diagnosis does not meet strict CDC guidelines. Last week, the CDC began using a new definition of AIDS that will include many of these patients, but the

change is not yet reflected in the AIDS statistics.

In general, doctors will be able to call a case AIDS if the victim's blood has AIDS antibodies and he shows clear outward signs of the disease. In the past, doctors had to isolate the germ responsible for an opportunistic infection, which might have required a biopsy or other test not in the patient's best interest. The new definition will also include patients with AIDS-related brain disease or severe weight loss who don't have other opportunistic infections.

Finally, about 15 percent of the total number of AIDS cases are in the process of being reported. Morgan says it typically takes about two months for a case report to get from the doctor to the CDC. But sometimes the delay is much longer.

"We're still hearing about 1984 and 1983 cases," he said.

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y to raise hool meals

prices will remain among the lowest in the Metropolitan area.

The cost of lunch for elementary youngsters will actually be the lowest, with prices elsewhere ranging from a low of 90 cents in Alexandria and Arlington counties in Virginia to \$1 in Frederick, Howard and Prince George's counties in Maryland and \$1 in Fairfax County, Va. Baltimore county elementary students pay \$1.15 for lunch.

The cost of reduced price meals for qualifying students will not be changed. These will continue at 20 cents for lunch and 10 cents for breakfast.

to be distributed

er, stamps or energy assistance. A single-person household earning \$670 or less may qualify, as would a household of four, for instance, not earning over \$1,375 monthly.

The School of Continuing Education at Asbury Methodist Village in Gaithersburg begins its ninth year this fall. A program of courses and lectures has been set up for 1987-88 by the committee on continuing education.

Dr. Austin Gisriel chairs the committee; Miss Elizabeth Fox is dean of the school which is open to the public. Classes begin in September, with sessions scheduled for the morning, afternoon and evening.

Beginning on Sept. 23, 55 Alive, a driver's refresher course, designed by AARP is planned for two sessions on Wednesday and Thursday at 10 a.m. in Parker Hall.

The Montgomery College course A Morning with the Diplomats, is being offered Oct. 1 - Nov. 19 on Thursdays at 10 a.m. in Parker Hall, with Robert Donihi, Montgomery College professor, as the instructor.

Ed Camp will teach a paper sculpture class on Tuesdays at 10 a.m. in the Mund Paint Studio, Oct. 6 through Feb. 23, 1988.

Four sessions on the constitution will be held on Wednesdays, Oct. 4 - Nov. 4 in Parker Hall. The instructor will be Dr. Ernest Griffith.

In January, 1988, christian biographies II will be taught on Wednesdays at 10 a.m. in Parker Hall.

Intermediate bridge will be offered on Wednesday evenings at 7:30 p.m. in the E-F Recreation Room during January and February, 1988. Mrs. Peggy Reich will be the instructor.

In the field of art, Mrs. Marion Brodsky will teach a class in art appreciation, The Impressionists, which will meet on Thursday afternoon, Jan. 7 - February 25 in Parker Hall. Oil Painting will follow on Fridays at 10 a.m. in Mund Paint Studio, with instruction by Mrs. Lois Heath.

Monday Night Specials return at 7:30 p.m. in Parker Hall during January, 1988. They will feature Let's Talk about Books, with Mrs. Beulah Bartholomew; supreme court reporting discussed by Dr. Richard Carelli; and Poetry I love by Emory Basford.

On Thursdays in January, 1988, at 10 a.m. in Parker Hall, Dr. John McLaughlin will present two lectures - The Church and State, and Issues Before the Church.

An illustrated set of lectures on Spain, Crossroad of Civilization Through the Centuries, will be given by Dr. and Mrs. Wesley Childers, scheduled for Mondays at 7:30 p.m. in Parker Hall during February, 1988.

Dr. Iona McLaughlin will once more being her Shakespearean course to this program, entitled The Play's the Thing,

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should at least conduct an interview process "to see who's out there."

After Commissioner Richard Grossnickle made the motion to retain the firm, which county Comptroller Thomas Fox said has been hired by Frederick County since the 1960s, Hoke and Stup made comments of disapproval.

"We're not requiring competition," said Hoke. "We're rolling right over into it again," Stup said.

The county's representative from the Baltimore firm took a leave of absence from the company last year, leaving the county unsure of its contact point during the touchy refinancing of the bond for Frederick Memorial Hospital's new wing, Fox said. The void in personnel continuity at the firm also came at a time when tax reform had many financial planners uncertain of their next move, he pointed out.

Fox said he is happy with the commissioners' choice to keep Semmes, Bowen and Semmes. "It's sort of like going to the doctor's. You don't just take the first one coming down the road," he said. "Semmes, Bowen and Semmes is a well-respected firm," he added.

—Linda Allnock

Southern States Cooperative to hold meeting

Election of local board members and Farm Home Advisory Committee members along with operations reports, will be among the highlights of the annual membership meeting for Southern States Cooperative Inc. Frederick. The 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 9, meeting will be held at the New Midway Volunteer Fire Department in Keymar.

The theme of the meeting will be "Southern States: The Growing Team." William Knill of Mount Airy will serve as chairman of the meeting.

James McCarron of Taneytown, a member of the Southern States Cooperatives regional staff, will report on supply and marketing operations for the 1986-87 fiscal year. The report will also include a slide/tape presentation.

This presentation summarizes changes resulting from recent growth of Southern States and changes initiated to ensure future growth in level of service and quality of products.

Local operations and services rendered to agriculture in the community will be discussed by Robert P. Roberson, manager of SSC Inc.-Frederick Petroleum Service. There will be a special recognition ceremony

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