

County's AIDS cases cannot be confirmed

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SANTA CRUZ — Health officials suspect there have been four cases of AIDS in Santa Cruz County, but there is no way to confirm it and confirmations of future cases may also be in doubt.

County Health Officer George Wolfe is urging the state to change its rules so that reported victims are identified by their counties of residence.

"As it is, we have checked with the state since AIDS became a reportable disease in March to see if any victims resided in this county and their answer, to my dismay, is that they don't know," Wolfe told The Sentinel.

Wolfe said some suspected victims are sent to San Francisco for further diagnoses and they are registered there as residents of San Francisco.

He said he has heard via the medical grapevine that there were four cases before communicable disease reporting was required by the state "but that's not official and I have to treat it as hearsay," said Wolfe.

AIDS is the acronym for "acquired immune deficiency syndrome," a condition in which something has caused the disease-fighting white blood cells to fail.

Of the 1,450 cases reported nationwide, 500 persons have died. It is believed that all AIDS victims will die

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AIDS

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from a disease their body should normally fight off.

Of the victims, 71 percent have been male homosexuals and 14 percent have been drug users who used a needle.

It is believed the needle carries AIDS blood from one victim to the next. Also affected are hemophiliacs and it is believed their contract is through blood donations.

The cause of AIDS has not been isolated, but the most popular theory is that it is a sub-microscopic virus carried by blood.

However, semen is suspected, although not as a direct carrier.

"Semen is very antigenic, meaning it contains a lot of antigens and if injected into the body, the body will create a lot of antibodies in response.

"The semen doesn't contain the organism (that causes AIDS) but perhaps repeated exposure to a number of different semen puts a challenge on the immune system that might overload that system and lead to the development of AIDS," said Wolfe.

Wolfe said the vagina and mouth have natural protective systems against antigenics, "but the rectum does not."

The breakdown of the immune system makes its victims susceptible to a type of skin cancer and pneumonia that is always around us, Wolfe said.