



World Virus news

ACT UP split in the USA

The New York branch of the HIV and AIDS campaigning group ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power) is in the process of trademarking its name. This follows splits with other ACT UP groups in San Francisco and Hollywood who have recently argued that HIV does not exist and is not the cause of AIDS.

Jail for Japanese HIV blood chiefs

A Japanese court last week jailed three former drug company chiefs over a scandal in which HIV-contaminated blood products infected 1,434 people. A total of 493 of those infected have so far died of AIDS, according to the Health Ministry. The three bosses of the Green Cross company were given between 14 months and three years in prison for supplying untreated blood clotting agents, imported from the USA.

New study of African strain of HIV

The drugs manufacturer Bristol Myers Squibb has donated a \$18.2 million grant into the research of HIV-10 subtype, an HIV strain particularly prevalent in Africa. The Harvard AIDS Institute is working in Botswana to study the strain's ability to resist treatment. Until now, HIV research has centred on HIV-1B, which is found in most developing countries, while HIV-1C is found throughout Southern and Eastern Africa and India.

Cheaper AIDS drugs sought

A United Nations trade conference in Thailand last week attracted protesters who want Western nations to allow low cost versions of AIDS drugs to be made available to the developing world. Drug manufacturers charge retail prices for anti-HIV drugs which are far above the budgets of people in the third world. Less than two per cent of Thai people with HIV can afford the medications and few Africans can at all, claim protesters.

Lust and life

Fancy barebacking tonight? asks Nigel Wrench



Nigel Wrench: strong opinions in the 'bareback' debate

The first guy I ever fucked without a condom gave me HIV. What's more, that night on Hampstead Heath, he wanted me to fuck him without a condom. We were, of course, 'barebacking', though six years ago no-one had thought to use that word. Those were the times, after all, when the words 'AIDS' and 'crisis' invariably appeared in the same sentence here in the First World, often next to each other. But these times are not

those, and I have a candid, unapologetic admission: if that night on the Heath was the first unprotected sex I ever had, it was by no means the last. Since I've been HIV-positive, and especially in these Protease Years, I've had 'unsafe' sex more times than I can remember, often with men whose names I could not tell you now.

I write this in expectation of an attack and in part as a response to the debate that you may have seen in the pages of

obscures what is actually going on. Barebacking, if I must use that word, is happening and not just, as some would have it, via the internet, chatlines and at privately arranged 'sex parties', whatever the hell they are.

No, barebacking is happening at a sauna or a backroom near you, without fanfare or announcement and often without words. I know because I've been there and I know because I am one of those who've done it.

I do not seek deliberately to

tion is vitally important. Because what everyone seems to have forgotten in the heat and the excitement of condemning barebacking in the pages of *Boyz* is that what happens in any consensual sexual act is the responsibility of both, or all, parties involved. You always have, in the backrooms I've been in, the opportunity to say "no", to draw away, or to pull out a condom.

But if a partner consents, either verbally or physically, then perhaps barebacking is on the cards. I don't assume much, but I do assume, in any sexual act in which I am involved, that there is a choice.

So there was a choice for me the night that I was infected on Hampstead Heath. And it was a choice that I, as much as the guy I was having sex with, was free to make.

Barebacking can be warm, exciting and involving. We need to debate it. But don't let's start by writing it off as irresponsible and stupid. That, frankly, is both absurd and dangerous.

And, incidentally, it's high time that those of us with AIDS had a voice in this debate.

■ Nigel Wrench can be heard on PM on Radio 4.

It's absurd to attempt to corral into a corner those who choose to have unprotected sex, and label them as pariahs

Boyz magazine, this paper's sister publication.

In brief, a contributor to the letters page suggested he and some others with HIV were out to infect those who were negative. The response was vitriolic, more or less unanimous and might be summed up as: "We don't need your type here. You are betraying your own kind."

The trouble with this is that it simultaneously dismisses and

infect anyone. And I am not part of some AIDS army out to recruit everyone who comes anywhere near. I simply seek to point out that there is a rational debate to be had. It's absurd to corral into a corner those who choose to have unprotected sex, and label them as pariahs.

And mostly, let's be clear, I'll often use a condom, either of my own volition, and always if prompted to. That last qualifica-