

* BULLETIN HEALTH

By Alistair Kyte



SCREEN TEST

» **If you're approaching 30, you should seriously start considering getting a yearly check-up from your doctor. Not only can he or she provide helpful tips to lead a healthier, happier life, but some of the routine tests they'll perform may go a long way to identifying severe health problems early enough to be successfully treated.**

But if you're one of those really paranoid people, you can always

just get your genes screened for cancer. According to new research, scientists believe they have identified vital gene variants that show an increased risk of testicular cancer, which is the most common form of cancer in young men. In a new study in the journal *Nature Genetics*, researchers at the University of Pennsylvania and a specialist at the Abramson Cancer Center are claiming that men with two copies of the common version of the c-KIT ligand (KITLG) gene are 4.5 times more likely to develop testicular cancer than men with two copies of the less common versions of the gene.

THE QUESTION REMAINS, IF YOU JUST FOUND OUT THAT YOU'RE AT MUCH GREATER RISK OF DEVELOPING CANCER, WOULD YOU TRY TO BE A BETTER PERSON AND LIVE A HEALTHIER LIFE? WOULD YOU QUIT SMOKING, START EXERCISING REGULARLY AND WATCH WHAT YOU EAT? YOU PROBABLY WOULD. **SO WHY NOT JUST DO IT ANYWAYS?**

CLOSER TO A CURE?

» **Scientists have been working tirelessly to develop a vaccine for HIV since the deadly virus stormed into the world's consciousness in the 1980s. Many researchers now believe that the scientific community has come closer than ever to just that – developing an HIV vaccine that could potentially inoculate billions, and guard them against ever acquiring the virus.**

The study was conducted by the Ministry of Health in Thailand in coordination with the U.S. Army, and while the potential vaccine was only moderately successful against two strains of a highly mutable virus, it was the first documented successful case on record. **Some 16,000 HIV-negative Thais volunteered to take part in the trial between 2003 and 2006.** Half were given test

vaccines and the other half placebos, without any knowledge of which they received. Subjects were then tested every six months. From those who took the placebo, 74 became infected with HIV, compared with only 51 who took the vaccine, a 31 percent efficiency rate.

Researchers caution the test results are hardly definitive and aren't even fully understood yet. Many prominent scientists are questioning them altogether. Moreover, a ready-to-license vaccine is likely years away, but the progress is promising and scientists hope it catapults future studies forward.

What does this mean for you, right now? Not much. If you're having sex, use protection.

THINK TWICE BEFORE SHOOTING UP

» **In September, some Canadian health experts were claiming that the seasonal flu shot many people took last fall actually put them at greater risk of acquiring the H1N1 flu when it initially hit this spring. With a second wave of H1N1 now under way, it's raised questions about the practice of seasonal flu shots altogether.**

The information has yet to be validated as fact and not merely a coincidence, and many

experts are claiming it's bogus, but researchers noted that in four separate studies the **people who received the vaccine were more likely to fall ill with the H1N1 virus.** Makes a lot of sense, right? That's like going to the dentist to get cavities.

The report also prompted provincial health authorities to reassess the order in which people get flu shots, while some health bodies have even cancelled or postponed seasonal shots for certain age demographics altogether. Others see the mass inocula-

tion of the entire Canadian population as the proper protocol. What it all adds up to is a lot of questions about the process, and a lot of doubt.

In October (at the time this story was filed), federal health officials pronounced that a new H1N1 vaccine was safe and effective, urging Canadians to get the shot. Some 60 million shots were ordered and provinces across the country were expected to begin rolling it out in November and December.

REGARDLESS OF WHERE YOU STAND ON THE ISSUE, THE NEXT TIME YOUR WORKPLACE, SCHOOL OR COMMUNITY IS OFFERING VACCINATIONS FOR INFLUENZA, MAKE SURE YOU KNOW EXACTLY WHY YOU'RE SHOOTING UP. DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK QUESTIONS AND DO YOUR DUE DILIGENCE.

