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PRESS RELEASE

PREVENTION

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PRESS RELEASE ON THE "RELAPSE"

A debate on a presumed increase in high-risk sexual behaviour, especially among homosexuals living in Paris, has recently been attracting the attention of the general public. The term "relapse" is commonly used to refer to this phenomenon of growing rejection of condom use, a development that must be a matter of concern for all those involved in the combat against sexually transmitted diseases and transmission of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus.

Going beyond the polemics in the media, a survey conducted by the *Institut national de Veille Sanitaire* (InVS), the National Institute of Medical Surveillance, soon to be published, is likely to point to an increase in the number of cases of gonorrhoea, a condition indicative of unprotected sexual contact. This increase, which has been continuous over the last three years (beginning in 1998), is present throughout France, particularly among individuals with homosexual contacts living in the greater Paris area.

The increasing indifference of public opinion to the HIV/AIDS epidemic goes a long way to explaining this alarming development. Based largely on the mistaken idea that, given the progress made in treatment since 1996, AIDS is now said to be no more than a "chronic" disease, this indifference is also the result of diminished involvement in HIV/AIDS, at least in apparent terms, on the part of the authorities.

For this reason, the National AIDS Council wishes to underscore two facts with some force :

- while the medical progress may be promising, HIV/AIDS nevertheless remains a fatal disease, which can be stabilized only by lifelong medication that is extremely demanding on the patient and not always very effective ;
- the use of a male or female condom in sexual contacts, and adherence to appropriate hygiene rules in the use of syringes in the case of intravenous drug use, are therefore the only means of protection against the Human Immunodeficiency Virus.

Today, just as in the past, the fight against AIDS must inevitably involve avoidance of high-risk behaviour and requires all of us to shoulder our individual responsibilities.