

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**OLDER, BUT NOT NECESSARILY WISER,  
WHEN IT COMES TO SEXUAL HEALTH**

*~ New Canadian survey results reveal a contradiction when it comes to practicing safe sex among the 30-plus singles crowd ~*

**Toronto, Ontario (November 1, 2006)** – Results from a new Ipsos-Reid survey<sup>1</sup> released during International Herpes Awareness Week, show that while two-thirds (66 per cent) of single Canadians 30 years and older are concerned about getting genital herpes – and six in ten (61 per cent) are aware that it is extremely common – the majority do not take effective measures to protect themselves from contracting this incurable virus. Disturbingly, only 40 per cent of sexually active singles use a condom “all of the time,” and 25 per cent never use a condom.

Genital herpes is the second most common sexually transmitted infection,<sup>2</sup> with one-in-five Canadians affected; however, up to 80 per cent of them do not know it because they may not have or recognize the symptoms.<sup>3</sup>

The Ipsos-Reid survey of 1,243 single and divorced/separated/widowed Canadians age 30 and over was designed to assess their sexual and dating habits, and to determine how concerned they are about sexually transmitted infections (STI), particularly genital herpes.

“The dating scene is ever-changing: with high divorce rates and long-term relationships ending, many Canadians are experiencing love for the second time around,” says Catherine Wood, psychotherapist and relationship expert based in Toronto. “Amidst the excitement that often comes with dating, Canadians need to ensure they are taking responsibility for their sexual health.”

- more -

## **MORE PILLOW TALK REQUIRED WHEN IT COMES TO GENITAL HERPES**

Survey results reveal that while the majority (66 per cent) of single Canadians are concerned about getting genital herpes, 66 per cent are very uncomfortable asking someone if they have genital herpes. To complicate the situation further, 64 per cent do not trust people to tell them whether or not they have genital herpes.

“The survey shows that while single Canadians realize the seriousness of genital herpes, they have difficulty talking about it: this may be due to a lack of comfort in talking about sexual health and/or sexual history, a lack of awareness about the life-long aspects of genital herpes, as well as a social stigma that exists for people living with genital herpes,” says Ms. Wood.

Ms. Wood stresses the importance of establishing open communication about sexual health early in a relationship – ideally before having sex for the first time and not ‘in the heat of the moment.’ She acknowledges that this can be particularly overwhelming and uncomfortable if a person is already living with a sexually transmitted infection such as genital herpes. Ms. Wood offers the following advice to help people with genital herpes prepare for this important discussion with their partner:

- Gather information about genital herpes: find out everything you can before talking;
- Find a private, quiet place to talk;
- Tell them about your diagnosis as calmly and rationally as possible;
- Remain calm and be prepared to listen.

Ms. Wood concludes: “Canadians need to take control of genital herpes and their overall sexual health; when people are educated about genital herpes, they will be much more empowered and better equipped to foster open communication with their partner and make decisions about their relationship.”

- more -

## CONDOM USE NOT ENOUGH

The vast majority of singles surveyed (71 per cent) believe it is easy to protect themselves against genital herpes. Among those who were sexually active in the past four years\*, most say they use condoms (66 per cent) to protect themselves from getting genital herpes. Importantly, while condom use can decrease someone's risk of getting genital herpes, condoms alone are not enough. Condom effectiveness is reduced because lesions and viral shedding can occur anywhere in the boxer short area, even in the absence of signs or symptoms.<sup>4</sup>

Others surveyed indicated they protect themselves against genital herpes by abstaining from sex (11 per cent), the same number of respondents (11 per cent) say they do not use any methods to protect themselves against genital herpes. Still, others (42 per cent) responded that they only have sex with people who do not have genital herpes; this is a concern, as many people with genital herpes have symptoms so mild that they do not really notice them at all, or do not have any symptoms and may not know they are infected.<sup>5</sup>

“Genital herpes is a lifelong infection that causes a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms,” says Dr. Cheryl Main, Hamilton General Hospital.

“Fortunately, there are a number of things that can be done to control the infection and reduce the risk of transmission including: abstaining from sex during outbreaks and for a period afterwards, and using condoms for all sexual activity. Daily antiviral therapies can also be used to reduce the risk of transmission. It is critical that people understand how it is spread so they can protect themselves and their partners. If you or your partner have genital herpes ask your doctor about ways to reduce the risk of transmission.”

*\*Because respondents were allowed to provide more than one response, total response percentages may exceed 100.*

## **ABOUT GENITAL HERPES**

Transmitted by skin-to-skin contact, the genital herpes virus passes through a break in the skin or penetrates moist membranes and causes painful sores and lesions in the genital area. Once infected, the body cannot rid itself of the virus. Although there is no cure for genital herpes, there are ways to reduce the risk of transmitting the virus to a partner. If you have genital herpes, you can reduce the risk of transmission with daily antiviral medication, in combination with safer sex practices. Taking antiviral medication daily can also reduce the number of outbreaks.

The impact of genital herpes can vary widely from person to person. In addition to the painful physical symptoms of genital herpes, the psychosocial aspects cause significant distress for people – particularly those entering a new relationship. The most common psychological patient concerns include fear of transmission; fear of being judged or rejected by a partner; loneliness; depression; suicidal thoughts, and low self-esteem.<sup>6</sup> The management of these aspects is as important as addressing the physical symptoms. The good news is that these symptoms improve over time and can benefit greatly from counseling.

Information about genital herpes can be easily accessed on [www.herpeshealth.ca](http://www.herpeshealth.ca), by calling 1-866-252-4666 or by asking a physician for The Herpes Health Pack™. An on-line resource, [www.herpeshealth.ca](http://www.herpeshealth.ca) was developed by Canadian doctors who are experts in providing treatment for people living with genital herpes. Content on [www.herpeshealth.ca](http://www.herpeshealth.ca) is reviewed by physicians to ensure that the most recent and relevant information is available to visitors. Herpeshealth™ is an initiative of GlaxoSmithKline Inc.

- more -

## **GLAXOSMITHKLINE INC.**

GlaxoSmithKline Inc. – one of the world’s leading research-based pharmaceutical and healthcare companies – is committed to improving the quality of human life by enabling people to do more, feel better and live longer. In Canada, GlaxoSmithKline is a top 15 investor in Canadian research and development, contributing close to \$200 million annually. It is an Imagine Caring Company, and is recognized as one of the 50 best companies to work for in Canada.

- 30 -

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS RELEASE, PLEASE CONTACT:**

Dana Allison/Jaclyn Crawford

Edelman

Tel.: 416-979-1120, ext. 318/344

E-mail: [dana.allison@edelman.com](mailto:dana.allison@edelman.com)/[jaclyn.crawford@edelman.com](mailto:jaclyn.crawford@edelman.com)

---

<sup>1</sup> These are the findings of an Ipsos Reid poll conducted for GlaxoSmithKline and fielded from September 21st to September 25th, 2006. For the survey, a representative randomly selected sample of 1,243 single, separated/divorced, or widowed adult Canadians age 30 and over were interviewed via an Ipsos Internet-panel survey. With a sample of this size, the aggregate results are considered accurate to within  $\pm 2.8$  percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire adult Canadian population been polled.

<sup>2</sup> Mindel A. Genital Herpes: How much of a public health problem? *Lancet* 1998;351 (Suppl. III): 16-18

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved April 26, 2005 <http://herpesresourcecentre.com/mvf.html> under: Herpes Myths vs. Facts

<sup>4</sup> Herpes Health Pack™. Genital Herpes: The Facts; page 19

<sup>5</sup> Retrieved April 26, 2005 from [http://www.herpeshealth.com/about\\_herpes/am\\_i\\_at\\_risk.asp](http://www.herpeshealth.com/about_herpes/am_i_at_risk.asp) under: Facts that increase the risk of genital herpes

<sup>6</sup> Retrieved October 10, 2006 from [http://www.herpeshealth.com/living\\_with/how\\_do\\_you\\_feel.asp](http://www.herpeshealth.com/living_with/how_do_you_feel.asp) under: How Do You Feel?