



Michelle Aukstik
(847) 240-1746
maukstik@aad.org

Aisha Hasan
(847) 240-1735
ahasan@aad.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**NEW STUDY FINDS COMMON SKIN CONDITIONS MISCONSTRUED AS
CONTAGIOUS COULD AFFECT SOCIAL LIVES OF YOUNG ADULTS**

NEW YORK (Aug. 2, 2007) – When it comes to being lucky in love, new research examining knowledge and attitudes about contagious diseases in Americans 18 to 25 years of age suggests that people with psoriasis and eczema may be at a distinct disadvantage.

At the American Academy of Dermatology’s Summer Academy Meeting 2007, dermatologist Alexa Boer-Kimball, MD, MPH, FAAD, assistant professor of dermatology at Harvard Medical School in Boston, Mass., presented data showing that concern about contracting a contagious disease may be an important factor in determining social attitudes and affect activities, such as dating, in adolescents and young adults.

Principal investigator Dr. Kimball and her colleagues analyzed survey data from 503 subjects age 18 to 25, representing a general sample of the population, who responded to a National Psoriasis Foundation questionnaire conducted in October 2005 examining their beliefs and attitudes about contagious diseases.

“Our study found that much confusion remains in this sample of the general population about whether or not psoriasis and eczema are contagious,” said Dr. Kimball. “Moreover, when these respondents were uncertain about whether they were dealing with someone who might be contagious, most said they would err on the side of caution and avoid social and romantic activities. Respondents who correctly knew psoriasis was not contagious were more likely to say they would date someone with the condition.”

- more -

Not surprisingly, physical appearance is a top consideration for young people when it comes to dating. The survey found that the vast majority (83 percent) of young adults surveyed rated how a person looks as an important factor when first asking someone out on a date. More than half (62 percent) of the respondents also reported that they take the condition of a person's skin into consideration, and three-fourths of respondents indicated that overall health also is a top priority when making the decision to date someone.

While Dr. Kimball noted that a statistically significant number of subjects correctly thought conditions like HIV or herpes were more contagious than psoriasis or eczema, a high proportion of people surveyed were unsure whether psoriasis or eczema was contagious (36 percent and 28 percent, respectively). In contrast, only 3.9 percent of subjects were unsure if HIV was contagious, and only 4.9 percent of subjects were unsure about the contagious nature of herpes.

“Even though our study showed that only a few people incorrectly believed that psoriasis or eczema was contagious, the uncertainty that did exist clearly affected behavior,” added Dr. Kimball. “Skin conditions such as psoriasis and eczema are usually clearly visible, so it is hard for patients to hide their condition. Ironically, the diseases you can't always see – such as HIV or herpes – are the ones that people really need to be concerned about.”

Overall, 85 percent of the young adults surveyed agreed that they would avoid romantic activities, such as kissing or being intimate, if concerned about an unspecified communicable disease. When asked about psoriasis specifically, 40 percent of respondents were unsure whether a person could contract psoriasis from touching someone or if a person should avoid being intimate with someone who has it.

In addition, one-fourth of respondents were unsure what to do when faced with concern about contracting a disease, emphasizing the lack of a clearly defined behavior when confronted with a known potential health threat.

“For patients with psoriasis or eczema, this study demonstrates that they need to be prepared to respond to questions or concerns about their condition in

a way that they are comfortable,” said Dr. Kimball. “We hope that by further educating the general public that psoriasis and eczema are not contagious, we can help protect these patients’ self-confidence and improve their acceptance by their peers.”

Psoriasis, which is characterized by raised, thickened patches of red skin covered with silvery-white scales, affects approximately 2 percent to 3 percent of the general population. In a majority of patients, the onset of psoriasis typically begins around age 18. Eczema, a chronic skin condition characterized by itchy, inflamed skin, affects an estimated 10 percent of infants and approximately 3 percent of the total population in the United States. To learn more about psoriasis or eczema, visit www.skincarephysicians.com.

Headquartered in Schaumburg, Ill., the American Academy of Dermatology (Academy), founded in 1938, is the largest, most influential, and most representative of all dermatologic associations. With a membership of more than 15,000 physicians worldwide, the Academy is committed to: advancing the diagnosis and medical, surgical and cosmetic treatment of the skin, hair and nails; advocating high standards in clinical practice, education, and research in dermatology; and supporting and enhancing patient care for a lifetime of healthier skin, hair and nails. For more information, contact the Academy at 1-888-462-DERM (3376) or www.aad.org.

#

Editor’s Note: *This study was conducted by the National Psoriasis Foundation (NPF) with support from Galderma. Dr. Kimball is a member of the medical board of the NPF and has been an investigator for Galderma.*