Kiss Hysteria

Media gives lip service to saliva scare

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In reaction to last season’s hyper-hysterical headlines tagging deep-kissing as a mode of HIV infection, GMHC medical director Dr. Perry Halkitis had one thing to say: It’s the blood, not the saliva. “He had very bad gum disease and often bled,” Halkitis said, referring to the HIV positive man who reportedly gave the virus to his wife, who also had bum gums. “Kissing is a very low risk activity and a really important part of sex. This case only underscores a longstanding caution: Make sure there are no cuts or sores in your mouth.” Gregg Gonsalves, the Treatment Action Group’s policy director, was a tad more emphatic. “You are more likely to get hit by a bus than to get HIV by kissing,” he said. “Every few years we have some sort of casual-contact hysteria breaking out.” The CDC finally hushed the fuss by confirming the “blood, not saliva” take, but more than one prevention activist bemoaned the moral of the story: People prefer to panic than to accept that HIV risk can be reduced-but never entirely eliminated-from their lives.

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