



GAZETTE, DAVE SIDAWAY

Marchers walk in silence along St. Catherine St. yesterday to mark World AIDS Day.

## Death-mask rally delivers AIDS message

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THE GAZETTE

They walked in single file down the middle of St. Catherine St. yesterday afternoon — 93 women and men each holding white death masks in front of their faces.

They marched silently, baffling many Christmas shoppers. But their message was clear: 93 women in Quebec have died of AIDS.

Dominique Bourque, 28, walked slowly at the head of the line.

She said she decided to join the march because two women friends have tested positive for the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) believed to cause acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

"It makes me mad that all these women have died," Bourque said. "Did you know that more than

1,000 women in Quebec are now infected with the AIDS virus?"

The march, organized by the AIDS activist group ACT UP, was one of a dozen activities held throughout the city yesterday to mark World AIDS Day 1990.

The theme of the international event was "Women and AIDS."

In Montreal, hundreds of people participated in activities ranging from a service for people with AIDS at Sanctuaire St. Jude church to free condom handouts at Alexis Nihon Plaza and the Faubourg St. Catherine.

Jean Roy, a community health worker, said he distributed about 5,000 condoms at the Faubourg. "It was just crazy," he said. "Some people were asking for more than one condom."

At a community centre on east-

end Beaudry St., more than 30 people sewed colorful quilts in memory of friends or relatives who have died of AIDS.

Michael Hendricks, an organizer of the downtown march, said women from all walks of life are becoming increasingly susceptible to AIDS.

"We realize that few people in Quebec know that so many women are dying of AIDS," he said. "These are plain old ordinary women — housewives even."

In Quebec, the number of people with AIDS has risen to 1,505. Health Minister Marc-Yvan Côté said. Of those, 140 cases are female. It is estimated that an additional 800 to 1,300 Quebec women are infected with HIV. Seventy per cent of them live in the Montreal area.

Worldwide, an estimated 8 million to 10 million people are infected. Contrary to the popular North American view that AIDS is mainly a disease of gay men and drug addicts, at least a third of the victims around the world are women.

AIDS is caused by a virus that weakens the immune system, leaving people vulnerable to fatal infections. The virus is found in blood, semen or vaginal fluids of infected people and is most often spread through sexual intercourse or by sharing needles. An infected mother also can pass it on to her unborn child.

Dr. Dominique Tessier, an AIDS specialist, told a seminar at the Université du Québec à Montréal that one-third of Quebec women infected with HIV have passed the virus to their children. □