Madonna, Taylor among victims of Aids rumors

*ABC News* was on the phone. When the caller

Wanted to know would Madonna announce she

had tested positive for the Aids virus?

Warner Bras Records wasn't planning. any

news conference. Its 'pop siren was in good

health. But a Hollywood rumor had so

vigorously circulated .that fiction was being

taken as fact.

This practice of branding stars with an Aids

Diagnosis because of weight loss, an impromptu

vacation or a simple change of plans has

become so prevalent that Aids activists gave it

a name.

They call it "outing by disease".

Madonna's incorrect public diagnos is forced

- her to issue an increasingly common statement.

She was, not sick. She was not HIV positive.

Instead ,she had become the latest victim in the

latest spinoff of a very .old game. Gossip ,Hollywood style. Or: ''Is .it true you

tested positive?"

"The dam burst and we couldn't hold it back

any more," said Bob Merlis, Warner's vice president

of national publicity."With nobody

denying it, it takes on life of its own. ..

"I got a call *from ABC News* asking where to

send a Crew for the news conference."

Madonna was not alone. Elizabeth Taylor,

co-founder of the American Foundation for -

Aids Research. or AMFAR ,has been subiected

to much speculation about whether her health

problems were Aids-related .She .has issued

several statements saying they weren't.

Similar rumours about :Burt Reynolds,

Richard Pryror and television actor Joe Penny

Grew so rampant - in both tabloids and more

conservative publications – that each felt

compelled to deny the stories.

This muckraking is occurring in an industry,

with one of the world's largest concentrations of people with Aids. Hollywood also' is the

leader in fund-raising for the epidemic.

Yet Tinseltown, while Promising to turn out

in force for a gala AMFAR benefit honouring

Madonna a few weeks ago, nonetheless has

been burning up phone and fax lines. gossiping

about who is - or more accurately ,is not -

infected.

The sniping intensified after Earvin "Magic"

Johnson announced last November that he was

HIV ·positive.

Indeed,many activists look to Johnson, the

former Los AngelesLakers basketbal1star, to

provide mainstream support for Aids

education.For the last 10years, as the disease

ravaged Hollywood's creative community,

many hid their dia2nosis. .

Public health wotters and gay ilctivistsare

disturbedby the upswingin Aidsgossip.It's far

from harmless,they say, and instead provides

an environmentthat only adds to the stigma.