

Sex education material reviewed

OLYMPIA (AP) — The difficult question of how much safe-sex material must be included in AIDS education to meet state requirements may be answered by officials this week.

Darcy Lee of the equity office of the Washington superintendent of public instruction is reviewing Stanwood school policies and sex education materials that stress abstinence.

The approach makes almost no mention of sexual practices which minimize the risk of AIDS transmission.

In addition, revised ninth and tenth grade programs developed by Teen-Aid Inc. of Spokane under a \$300,000 federal grant are being checked for medical accuracy by the state office of HIV-AIDS.

An earlier version of the programs was rejected for depicting condoms as an unreliable way to prevent acquired immune deficiency syndrome, said Pam Baldwin, AIDS prevention supervisor for the state school superintendent.

Teen-Aid's seventh and eighth grade materials were approved on the first try, she said.

HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus, the carrier of AIDS, a fatal disease spread chiefly by sex practices that involve contact with blood and semen and by the sharing of hypodermic syringes among users of illegal drugs.

Teen-Aid materials, which advise adolescents to abstain from sex outside marriage and say almost nothing about safe sex, form the sex-education curriculum in five school systems in the state, said company director LeAnna Benn.

Opposing such programs are parents and health educators who assert that teen-agers need as much information as possible on sex.

They cite statistics like those compiled by the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department showing 40 percent of all girls in the state will become

pregnant at least once by age 20.

They also noted a report two months ago from the Centers for Disease Control that showed 2,394 teen-agers in the nation had contracted AIDS, compared with 201 in December 1987.

"AIDS is rising among teen-agers, and with teen-agers you have the most risk," said Gayle Lloyd, a spokeswoman for the federal agency in Atlanta. "Teen-agers experiment with sex and may be influenced to use drugs, which makes them susceptible to high-risk behavior."

Baldwin noted that state law requires instruction on AIDS in public schools and allows the use of any materials that are medically accurate, emphasize that sexual abstinence and avoiding intravenous drug use are the only sure ways to avoid AIDS, and teach that condoms can fail.

Marian Williams, a health educator with the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department's AIDS prevention program and one of the officials who review education materials for medical accuracy, said curriculums based exclusively on abstinence are inadequate.

Like Baldwin, she cited the high percentage of teenagers who become sexually active before graduating from high school.

"A problem arises when a curriculum-maker stresses abstinence as the only acceptable behavior," Williams said. "During their adolescence, kids are making choices about sexual behavior whether we want them to or not."

"Abstinence is a great ideal, but [educational material] needs to give teens information so they can make healthy decisions" if they do have sex.

On the other hand, the kind of AIDS instruction sought by Baldwin and Williams "starts with the assumption that all kids are going to be sexually active or drug-active," Benn asserted. "That assumption causes that behavior."







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Kato, a five-year old shepard/labrador mix, eagerly tries to get its new found friend to play fetch.

Photo by Steve Card

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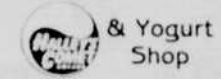
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