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Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders talked with Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke yesterday before they appeared on ABC's "This Week with David Brinkley."

Nation's top doctor says all students need drug, sex education

By JIM ABRAMS
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Comprehensive health education from kindergarten through 12th grade is crucial to reducing the numbers of children born out of wedlock, Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders said yesterday.

Schools teach driver education, "but when we come to health education, which includes sexuality education, we refuse to teach them that," Elders said on ABC's "This Week with David Brinkley."

"A major cause of children dying is really related to many of the social problems impacting their health, so I really feel we need to have a comprehensive health-education program in our schools from kindergarten through 12th grade. This is the equalizer," she said.

Elders said health education must include the entire spectrum of social issues including drugs, alcohol, sex and violence. "It's not going in there and giving them a plumbing lesson. I feel that's a waste of time."

Elders, who as the former top health official in Arkansas was outspoken on the need to provide condoms to sexually active teen-agers, said that while con-

traceptives should be made available, "if you don't have the education, I could go out and throw condoms up in the air and let them rain."

She noted that 85 percent of children from upper- and middle-income families receive early childhood education, compared with 18 percent of children on welfare. "They're the ones who absolutely need it the most."

Charles Murray of the American Enterprise Institute, appearing on the same show, blamed the welfare system for the sharp rise in single mothers. "You lift the economic burden, social stigma goes down," he said.

Sixty-seven percent of black children were born out of wedlock last year, up from 49 percent a decade earlier. White children with single mothers accounted for 17 percent of the total, up from 10 percent in 1982, while the rate went up from 16 to 27 percent for Hispanics.

One study predicts that at the end of the decade, 80 percent of minority births and 40 percent of all births will be out of wedlock. If that happens, he said, "Everything that you are looking at now in terms of our reaction to crime and our reaction to drugs and the rest of it will be many times greater."