

THE KENTUCKY POST



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HEALTH DEPARTMENT REVAMPS MESSAGE

Sex ed's emphasis: Abstain

By **Cindy Starr**
Post staff reporter

The Northern Kentucky Independent District Health Department has responded to its abstinence-only sex-education mandate with two new initiatives based on abstinence until marriage.

The two programs, "Choosing the Best Path" and "Choosing the Best Life," are eight-week abstinence and character-development programs that

target middle school and high school students, respectively.

The Health Department's human sexuality committee approved the initiatives last month, and the programs are now being shared with Northern Kentucky schools.

Kathy Gavin, the health department's director of health education and planning, said the department did not know yet which schools would use the programs.

The "Choosing the Best"

programs explore the causes and risks of early sexual involvement, HIV/AIDS and peer pressure, while helping students develop assertiveness skills through role playing.

Ms. Gavin said the "Choosing the Best" programs also employ a few "scare tactics," including a video that shows sexually transmitted infections in various stages. Students learn that every 10 seconds a

See **ABSTAIN** on 5K



Funding boost

▶ Abstinence programs that bar any discussion of birth control or condoms to prevent pregnancy or AIDS are in line for a 33 percent

increase in the budget President Bush is to submit to Congress.

▶ See story on Page 2A.

We hope to have all the dumps cleaned up by Sept. 1. Having them all cleaned up should make it a lot easier to spot any new dumps that pop up.

— Gary Hensley, Kenton County's solid waste coordinator

Tax hike to help prop up

Abstain: Health agency message is revamped

From 1K

teen-ager contracts such an infection, Ms. Gavin said.

In a controversial departure from past policy, the district's board voted overwhelmingly last March to require that any sex education programs offered by the health department be based on "abstinence until the commitment of marriage."

The decision has brought criticism from residents and health professionals who say the abstinence-only focus deprives many teens of information they need to make responsible choices.

"The concern of our agency is there are community needs that are not being addressed," said PJ Perez, executive director of Social Health Education, a United Way agency. "A significant section of the population anywhere - including Northern Kentucky - is left out if the only information provided is abstinence until marriage."

The health department's new initiatives do not teach students about contraceptive methods or how to use them. However, they do address the potential for contraceptive methods, such as condoms, to fail.

"If (schools) want education that includes contraception or barrier methods, or risk reduction, they will need to get that elsewhere," Ms. Gavin said.

If a student asks a question about contraception during the health department's abstinence-only programs, she said, "we would answer the question and provide the information, while emphasizing abstinence only until marriage."

Covington Holmes High School follows the same procedure, said Mary Alice Parrish, child development services teacher.

"If I'm asked a question, I will answer it, but I'll follow it up by saying that method will not protect you from STDs - or from heart-ache," Ms. Parrish said.

Alternative programs that stress abstinence but also teach students about contraception are available to Northern Kentucky schools from other organizations, including Planned Parenthood of Southwest Ohio and Northern Kentucky and Cincinnati-based Social Health Education and Postponing Sexual Involvement.

The last program, sponsored by Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, Cincinnati Public Schools and the United Way, has been embraced by much of Kentucky.

The program has 10,000 teen leaders in Kentucky and has reached more than 400,000 Kentucky students, said executive director Christopher Kraus.

Planned Parenthood spokeswoman Susan Momeyer said Planned Parenthood's program is abstinence-based, but not abstinence only.

"We feel young people need to know about a full range of options, including contraception - if not for now, certainly for the future," she said. "Knowing the number of

Department plans seminar

To help community leaders present the message of abstinence until marriage to teens, the health department is holding a two-day seminar for community leaders, Feb. 8-9, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Cincinnati Airport Marriott Hotel, 2395 Progress Drive, Hebron.

The seminar, called ChangeMakers, is designed to enable educators, religious and business leaders, health-care professionals and parents to learn about sexually transmitted infections and teen pregnancy from experts and to develop plans of action to take back to their schools, churches or communities.

ChangeMakers, developed in 1992 by the Medical Institute for Sexual Health, a nonprofit organization based in Austin, Texas, grew out of a physician's concern about the growing incidence of sexually transmitted infections and teen-age pregnancy.

The cost is \$100, but scholarships are available. Call the Northern Kentucky Independent District Health Department at (859) 578-7660 for information.

- Cindy Starr

teens who are sexually active, we would want a broader offering. Abstinence-only doesn't meet everyone's needs, even though abstinence as a concept and as a practice needs to be taught, needs to be emphasized."

Programs offered by Social Health Education teach students that abstinence is the best and most effective way to prevent sexually transmitted infections or unintended pregnancies, said Ms. Perez.

"We also recognize that abstinence is not a choice that everyone makes. Our programs do include, at the discretion of the school, information about consistent and correct use of contraception and condoms."

Postponing Sexual Involvement's Kraus said he believes the comparison between abstinence-based and abstinence-only sex education "is an artificial, rhetorical distinction used for political purposes."

Kraus said studies show that a sex education program is more likely to succeed in reducing infection and pregnancy if lessons:

- Are interactive.
- Develop positive peer pressure and address social pressures, such as the media.
- Address factors, including trauma, abuse, disturbed relationships and poverty, "that cloud a person's view of what their future's like."