

Koop blames TV for rise in teen pregnancy, disease

By Sister Mary Ann Walsh
Catholic News Service

LOS ANGELES — The television industry bears some responsibility for the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and the million-plus unwanted pregnancies affecting teenagers each year, said former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop July 17.

Television "can do a lot to influence young people," Koop said at an NBC press conference promoting a series of five one-hour specials on modern-day health concerns. The exact dates for the series were not released by the network.

The TV industry, Koop said, has a "particular" effect, both negative and positive, on behavior "leading so many teenagers into the problem of sexually



C. Everett Koop

transmitted diseases and the disgraceful number of 1.2 million unwanted pregnancies."

He urged television to be a good influence on youths and said "the best way to get health messages across to kids, for example, would be in a sitcom."

Koop singled out soap operas for particular criticism, saying that "young people who watch soap operas got the impression the only reason you got out of bed in the morning was to jump into somebody else's bed."

In an interview with Catholic News Service, Koop said that television "can emphasize morality" to address the problems of unwanted pregnancies.

"I think that an awful lot of people who are concerned about the health of

teenagers, as I have been for about 50 years, need to recognize that when you are dealing with teenagers it is extraordinarily difficult to change behavior.

"If you go to any high school senior class anywhere in this country," he continued, "and give them a quiz on AIDS, they know every answer. Then you ask them if they have changed their behavior because of that, they say 'No,' whether it is abstinence or use of a condom or any of the other things that might protect them from the very things we're talking about."

Koop said that what may be needed is a return "to good old-fashioned morality."

"I am convinced you cannot make a teenager change his or her behavior on the basis of fear of remote consequences," he added.

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