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J.S. must take aggressive stance to stop HIV in teens, panel says

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WASHINGTON — Government sarray over AIDS policy has left young people confused and vulnerable, the National AIDS Commission said yesterday in a new report urging availability of condoms at schools along with pleas for abstinence.

"Years of disagreement at the highest levels of the federal government over the proper messages to give young people have helped to create and perpetuate a national atmosphere of confusion and controversy," the commission said.

"Vigorous and unequivocal leadership" in a broad new educational effort is needed to teach young people about the risks of AIDS and how to prevent infection, the panel said.

In a second report issued yesterday, the commission also urged private businesses, in addition to government, to aggressively develop AIDS-education programs as well as workplace policies for infected employees.

"At too many work sites, managers and employees are in states of denial, complacency or ignorance — all of which can have adverse consequences for individuals and organizations," the commission said.

The AIDS panel, which was set up by Congress four years ago to advise the president and the govern-

Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Leanza Cornett, using her reign as Miss America to teach about AIDS, has run into censorship problems in her native Florida.

Some school officials told her not to use the word "condom" while talking to students; others forbade the name of the disease itself.

"When the notice said I couldn't talk about AIDS or sex, I was floored," she said.

Miss Cornett, 21, was told not to mention AIDS when visiting three elementary schools Tuesday in rural Bradford County, southwest of her Jacksonville home.

"I can adhere to any school

Miss America censored in Fla. over AIDS views

board's needs," she told a Rotary-Kiwanis meeting following her school visits.

"But I will not be an accomplice to the spread of this disease. People are dying from this disease. I feel guilty that I didn't speak about it. I don't want to lay blame, but the school board should feel guilty."

During her visits to the schools, she presented awards in Chevro-

let's "Driving for Education" program and gave 10-minute motivational speeches to students, said Todd Strawn, a businessman who sponsored part of the speaking tour.

Jo Ann Rowe, the Bradford County school superintendent, said yesterday that school officials are required to notify parents in advance if an outside speaker is going to discuss sexual issues, such as AIDS.

The school district's curriculum introduces the subject of AIDS in the fifth grade and sex education in the sixth grade.

Miss Cornett said it was the first time she had been told not to mention AIDS.

ment on AIDS policy, is in the final stages of preparing its final report to the president, expected at the end of the month. Its charter expires Sept. 3.

Years of 'Just say no'

Many public health officials have pressed for years for programs to educate young people on use of condoms and for availability of condoms at schools, arguing that young people

are sexually active regardless of the risk of acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

But under Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush, top administration policy-makers pressed instead for a "Just say no" approach to AIDS prevention, urging sexual abstinence.

They strongly opposed publicizing and distributing condoms, arguing that this would simply encourage

early sexual activity.

President Clinton, in office since Jan. 20, has yet to enunciate a new policy on AIDS for his administration.

The 15-member AIDS commission said a school-based AIDS prevention program should explore young peoples' values and attitudes, provide them with information; build skills and provide access to health care and social services, including

availability of condoms.

"Abstinence messages, such as the message to postpone sexual activity, should be included [in such a program] because this can be an effective way of reducing the risk of HIV," the panel said, using the abbreviation for human immunodeficiency virus, which causes AIDS.

It added, however: "Information and skills-building about other means of reducing the risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), such as use of condoms, should be included."

Infection spreads rapidly

The panel said HIV is spreading rapidly among teen-agers.

As of the end of March, 1,167 cases had been reported to the government.

But the low number of cases "masks the true picture" of infection among young people, the commission said.

The most common forms of transmission to date among young males have been through tainted blood transfusions to hemophiliacs and homosexual sex.

The most common means of transmission among young females have been heterosexual sex and the sharing of contaminated needles by drug abusers, the commission said.