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AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

A Doctor's Good Advice

IT ISN'T OFTEN that Planned Parenthood and the Reagan administration see eye to eye, but a national crisis has brought them together on at least one subject: AIDS. A report issued earlier this week by Surgeon General C. Everett Koop drew praise from the family-planning group specifically because it urges sex education in schools at the earliest possible grade. But that recommendation is not the only noteworthy item in Dr. Koop's frank and sensible report.

Wednesday's statement was prepared at the request of President Reagan and is styled "a report to the American people on AIDS." No reader could come away complacent about the statistics presented on the spread and deadliness of the disease, but the report contains more than facts. It exhorts Americans to put aside prejudices they may have against homosexuals and intravenous drug users, to help the victims of this epidemic and to stop talking nonsense about quarantines, universal blood tests and tattoos for those who test positive. Perhaps most gratifying to those who view the surgeon general as a conservative, he approaches this sensitive subject without making value judgments, only medical ones. "It is time," he says, "to put self-defeating attitudes aside and recognize that we are fighting a disease—not people."

On the issue of sex education, Dr. Koop is forthright. "There is now no doubt that we need sex education in schools and that it include information on sexual practices that may put our children at risk for AIDS." This risk applies primarily to homosexuals and intravenous drug users, and the report contains specific instructions on how people in these categories can reduce their exposure. But, as the most recent data on the spread of AIDS confirm, it is not limited to these groups, and the disease is spreading, through sexual contact, to the general population. Abstinence and the maintenance of mutually faithful monogamous relationships, whether homosexual or heterosexual, are the only sure means of avoiding sexually transmitted AIDS. But the report acknowledges that not everyone will accept such restrictions. It goes on to describe the steps that can be taken to reduce the risk.

Dr. Koop's statement sets a standard for other government officials—federal, state and local—in dealing with AIDS and its victims. Without a hint of mean-spiritedness or hesitation, he says three things. We must help and not condemn those who suffer. We must take precautions against the spread of AIDS. We must educate our children about the dangers of this disease. That's good advice, and it should be heeded.