

Flying the Koop

U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, who got his present job at the urging of pro-life forces in and around the fledgling Reagan administration and who has scarcely been heard from on that issue since, had one doozy of a bomb for his old supporters last week. Taking aim at AIDS, he recommended sex education starting in third grade, with detailed information about homosexuality starting in junior high school. A more complete case of mental takeover by the Washington establishment is probably not on record.

By way of introducing his new study on the subject, Dr. Koop observed that many people, especially young people, "are not receiving information that is vital to their future health and well-being because of our reticence in dealing with the subjects of sex, sexual practices, and homosexuality." Hmm. From what we have heard about what goes on in those sex-ed seminars in the public schools, "reticence" is not exactly the word that first comes to mind.

To be sure, Dr. Koop's course would not be the usual "value-free" how-to. "Couples who

engage in freewheeling casual sex these days are playing a dangerous game," he warns. Perhaps he expects parents to rally behind a sex-ed program designed to frighten kids into chastity. If so, he misses the point.

Chastity prevents AIDS — agreed. But fear does not produce chastity. Even as Dr. Koop was speaking, a conference sponsored by the Department of Health and Human Services was taking stock of "what works" in preventing teen-age pregnancy (not the same issue as AIDS, obviously, but relevant). There was general agreement that what works is teaching kids self-esteem and resistance to peer pressure — not merely providing information.

A compelling case can be made, on the other hand, that some children are harmed psychologically when given sexual information at too tender an age. As a result of its transfer of parental roles to institutions — which would be a dubious project even if it attained its advertised objectives — the present generation may be raising its children as emotionally handicapped misfits.

Physician, heal thyself.