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DAY OF AWARENESS: Campaign to fight teen sex

Students hope peers will question attitudes

May 6, 2002

BY WENDY WENDLAND-BOWYER
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Tiffany and Carlos are making out at her house. Tiffany's parents are out for the night. One thing leads to another, and soon Carlos is reaching into his pocket for a condom, but none's there. So Carlos and Tiffany:

A) Wait until next time when they have a condom. B) Have sex anyway. C) Stop completely and realize they've gone too far.

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy hopes thousands of teens from throughout the country will take time out to answer this question, and several others like it, on Wednesday for the first National Day to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

The main event for the day is an online quiz organizers hope will get teens thinking and planning what they would do should they ever find themselves in certain situations, said Bill Albert, spokesman for the Washington-based nonprofit campaign. At the end of the quiz are statistics, such as 50 percent of high school students are virgins, or a year's worth of diapers and baby supplies cost as much as 139 new pairs of Nikes or two used cars.

The Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy ran the quiz by a panel of 22 teens to make sure the



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wording and descriptions were believable. One of those teens was Sharon Lu, 17, of Troy, who serves on the campaign's youth leadership team. The campaign is flying Lu and team members to Washington, D.C., today and Tuesday to kick off the national event.

"Why don't parents and teens talk more about this?" asked Lu, a junior at Troy High School, of the issue of teen pregnancy. "Getting people talking is one of the things we are trying to do."

About one million American teens become pregnant every year, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Almost all of those pregnancies are unintended, and about one-third end in abortion, CDC statistics show.

While the percentage of teen pregnancies declined in the 1990s, the United States still has one of the highest rates among industrialized nations. About four in every 10 girls will become pregnant at least once before their 20th birthday, according to the campaign.

Some communities in Michigan are also planning events for Wednesday. In the Westland area, a teen prevention program called Wayne-Westland Community Teen Pregnancy Prevention Project, or TP3, is planning to send teens to places their peers hang out to tell them about the quiz and urge them to make an abstinence pledge, or at the very least, to practice safe sex.

In Washington, Lu and other members of the campaign's youth leadership team will hold a press conference and lobby Congress on the issue Tuesday.

Lu said she became active with the campaign when she applied to be a national correspondent for Teen People magazine, which is helping the campaign. Lu got the spot, and Teen People helped her apply for the leadership team more than a year ago.

Since then, Lu and the team have helped create public service announcements. Lu said she hopes the Internet quiz catches on.

About 73 percent of 12- to 17-year-olds in the United States use the Internet, Albert said, and organizers hope many will take the quiz, then pass it on to their friends.

"I think most teenagers have the knowledge of what it takes to prevent a teen pregnancy," Albert said. "But they have this cloak of invincibility about them -- that this is not going to happen to me. This quiz is a way to say, 'Yes, it can happen to you. You have to think about the consequences of sex, and you have to come up with a plan.'" *To take the quiz, or for tips about how to talk to your teen about sex, visit www.teenpregnancy.org. If you live in Wayne or Westland, and would like more information on TP3, call 734-416-1689 anytime.*

Contact WENDY WENGLAND-BOWYER at 313-223-4792 or wendland@freepress.com.

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