

STOP THE QUARANTINE FIRE SCHABAS

AIDS quarantine plan draws protest

By Kelly Toughill
TORONTO STAR

Anyone infected with the AIDS virus who continues to have intercourse could be forcibly confined under a new public health proposal — even if a condom is used and the person warns his or her sex partner of the risk.

The proposal by Dr. Richard Schabas, Ontario's chief medical officer of health, has drawn howls of protest from AIDS activists who say it misleads the public about the dangers of the disease and could force the province to lock up thousands of people.

"This is absolutely outrageous," said Stephen Manning, executive director of the AIDS Committee of Toronto. "It's irresponsible, unscientific and deeply disturbing. It would put thousands of people in this province in legal jeopardy and turn public health officers into the sex police. It's our worst nightmare."

Both Wayne Pittso, director of the Toronto PWA (People With AIDS) Foundation, and Miriam Mayhew, executive director of

Casey House, a hospice for people with AIDS, have called for Schabas' resignation.

Schabas defended the proposal yesterday, saying it is an appropriate public health measure to prevent the spread of the disease.

"The risk of intercourse with someone who is infected, even when a condom is used, is known to be too high," he said in a phone interview. Those who have intercourse with infected people are taking their lives in their hands, he warned.

Manning disputed his statement, and pointed out that the Ontario health ministry has spent millions of dollars urging the public to use condoms during sex to avoid contracting the virus.

Ontario public health officials now have little power to stop someone from knowingly spreading the virus.

Local medical officers of health can order a carrier not to expose others, but they have no way to enforce the order, other than referring the case to police for

prosecution under the Criminal Code.

Schabas has recommended to Health Minister Elinor Caplan that she reclassify AIDS as a "virulent" disease under provincial law, allowing public health officials to ask the courts to confine carriers to hospital if they are exposing others to the virus.

The court order would be reviewed after four months. Caplan is travelling in India and could not be reached for comment.

Most people had assumed that Schabas hoped to confine only those few carriers who continue to have unprotected sex with partners who have no idea the person is infected.

But Schabas said yesterday that public health orders should be issued to anyone infected with the virus who continues to have any form of sexual intercourse.

"My opinion is that the appropriate recommendation or order to someone known to be infected is not to have sexual intercourse

DEMONSTRATE

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5:30pm
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