Students learn about HPV, cervical cancer

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AMHERST — Sometimes they laughed and sometimes they covered their mouths in disbelief, but one thing was certain — students at E.B. Chandler paid attention Tuesday afternoon.

The students in Grades 7 and 8 spent some time in the afternoon listening to Teresa Norris, a sexual health educator with Sexpressions in Montreal.

"It's really an A to Z presentation on sexuality and making things real to the students to help them understand," said Norris following the presentation.

"I started off with some of my own experiences, such as partying, so they could see that I'm a real person ... that I'm human.

"But then I break it down for them to show them what it all means."

The presentation had Norris speaking to the students, and also the high school students earlier in the day, about why she talks.

She lost her friend in 2001 because of cervical cancer after contracting the human papillomavirus, or HPV.

But it isn't all about HPV that Norris talks about.

"I wanted to expand the message," she said, noting HPV is still the core of what she does cover.

During her presentation, Norris used inflatable dolls in examples. She also had a teacher on stage to hold a model of a penis while she showed the students the proper way to apply a condom.

"It's not all romantic like it is in the movies. That's not real life. You need to take that two minutes and put that condom on," she said, telling the students her favourite saying is, 'No glove, no love.'

She also told the females students to put their pride in their back pocket and go see their doctor, or the school nurse, for a Pap test once they become sexually active.

"It's not a big deal. You can handle it. It's not painful," 581 women died in Canada in 2008 because of cervical cancer and of those women, half of them weren't getting regular Pap tests.

Throughout her presentation, she brought forth a number of myths related to sexually transmitted infections and sex. She also had trivia questions to make sure students were paying attention.

"You don't need to remember all the names of STIs, but you should remember the symptoms," she said, adding anyone experiencing the symptoms should see a doctor.

Symptoms included rashes, itching, pimples, bumps, discharge, bleeding, pain, and sometimes no symptoms at all.

"When you're not wearing condoms or protecting yourself, the chances are very high that you will get an STI, you need to remember those symptoms," she said, noting that many people contract STIs and don't realize it.

Following the presentation, students were given pamphlets on HPV, as well as a ruler and magnet with website addresses students can go to for more information.

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