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MTV special profiles young people with HIV

NEW YORK: MTV is airing a special next week with profiles of three young people who have the HIV infection, amid worries that some people are taking the condition too casually.

The special, "I'm Positive," is scheduled to air Dec. 1. Drew Pinsky (pic), who is one of the show's producers, said that if it does well, he hopes it can become a regular series.

In three decades, infection with the virus that causes AIDS has gone from a virtual death sentence to a chronic condition that can be controlled with early detection and a drug regimen. But even if it doesn't develop into full-blown AIDS, there's still some doubt about the long-term health implications of living with HIV and the drugs designed to keep control of it, Pinsky said.

"People are taking it too casually ... and forgetting about it," Pinsky said.

A generational divide is evident in the profiles on "I'm Positive." California girl Kelly, one of the three subjects, feels in control of the situation despite her infection. The mother of Stephanie, a single Southern girl infected through one instance of unprotected sex, is distraught and thinks her daughter is about to die.

The third profile subject, Otis, had a hard time telling his family that he was HIV positive since it was only a year earlier that he revealed he was gay.

As proven by its programming on teenage pregnancy, MTV finds that this documentary-style programming is a good way to reach its young viewers with a message.

"Young people relate when they see their peers struggling with this phenomenon," Pinsky said.

MTV began running "safe sex" campaigns in 1985, and has been encouraging youngsters to get themselves tested for 15 years in an effort funded together with the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Two in five people infected with HIV each year in the United States are between the ages of 13 and 29, MTV's targeted audience. More than 1.1 million Americans are living with HIV infection, according to the Centres for Disease Control. - AP

