

Ad promotes AIDS risks with humour

By RUTH MATHEWSON

A YOUNG fiancée gossips happily in a Hong Kong beauty salon, chatting about her wedding preparations to the manicurist busy filing her nails.

But when she tells the beauticians she finally has found time to have her blood tested for the HIV virus, the salon staff reel in stunned amazement.

The scene will hit Hong Kong television screens next week as the first volley in a new "lively and light-hearted" AIDS awareness scheme.

Hong Kong's innovative Talk About AIDS campaign aims to bring the subject out into the open.

Government AIDS consultant Dr Lee Shui-shan said the two new 30-second ads veered away from the sombre "AIDS - It could happen to you" warnings.

"It's not just 'funniness' that counts, but the message," Dr Lee said.

"We want to make it more lively so that you can equate AIDS with something that's happening around you instead of something quite distant."

The young woman's casual revelation of her premarital HIV test will be televised from Thursday of next week in Cantonese and English.

Another advertisement features a disembodied mouth which warns viewers it is about to utter a four letter word. A piercing bleep obliterates the word and, only when the advertisement ends does the curious viewer discover the mystery word is AIDS.

AIDS Foundation spokesman Mike Sinclair said the lighter approach could work well in Hong Kong.

"In Holland, Germany and Sweden there are comedy sketches relating to condom use and AIDS. They're meant to be laughed at and I think that's a useful approach," he said.

"People's attention can be lost the moment you threaten them but you can get through with humour."

One Scandinavian advert shows a young man struggling to open a condom wrapper.

"He bites it and tears a hole in it then cuts it with scissors - it's a string of 'how not to' scenes," Mr Sinclair said.

The Talk About Aids adverts will precede a new AIDS Foundation campaign called "AIDS in the Family". Television adverts are being filmed now for screening in July or August.

The foundation will tour Hong Kong housing estates with a mobile information centre set up in a double-decker bus.

AIDS experts are eager to weigh up public reaction.

Dr Lee said: "I won't be surprised if some people say it's good and some say it's bad."

"But if there's controversy, if people are talking about it, that's good."