

Myths & facts about sexuality education

Youth have rights to accurate, balanced sex education--including information about contraception and condoms. Armed with accurate information, confidential health services, and a secure stake in the future, youth can be trusted to behave responsibly.

The Claims

Abstinence-only-until-marriage works

Sex education encourages students to become sexually active at younger ages

Teaching students about contraception encourages sexual activity and increases the chance of teenage pregnancy.

Contraceptives fail so frequently that we should only teach teens to abstain.

Contraceptives do not protect against HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

Condoms have a high failure rate.

The Facts

"Current research findings do not support the position that the abstinence-only approach to sexuality education is effective in delaying the onset of intercourse."¹

The World Health Organization reviewed evaluations of 47 programs in the United States and other countries. In 15 studies, sex and HIV/AIDS education neither increased nor decreased sexual activity and rates of pregnancy and STIs. However, in 17 studies, HIV and/or sex education delayed the onset of sexual activity, reduced the number of sexual partners, and/or reduced unplanned pregnancy and STI rates.^{2,3}

Expert panels that have studied this issue have concluded that comprehensive and HIV/AIDS education programs and condom availability programs do not increase sexual activity and can be effective in reducing high-risk sexual behavior among adolescents.⁴

Modern contraceptives are highly effective. The percent of women experiencing pregnancy within one year ranges from 0.03 percent using Depo-Provera to nine percent using the cervical cap (with perfect use). Even imperfect use protects women far better than does using no protection. Rates of pregnancy with imperfect use range from 0.03 percent using Depo-Provera to 21 percent using the female condom compared to 85 percent of women using no protection.⁵

Other than total sexual abstinence, only condoms currently provide significant protection against HIV and other STIs. That is why good programs educate students about the importance of condoms.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) confirms that condoms are very effective in affording protection against HIV and unwanted pregnancy. The NIH also reports that laboratory studies show that condoms can afford good protection against discharge diseases such as gonorrhea, chlamydia, and trichomoniasis.⁶

Condoms do not protect against the human papillomavirus (HPV).

Condoms cannot protect against viral infections on portions of the anatomy that condoms do not cover. However, the NIH report concludes that condom use can reduce the risk of HPV-associated diseases, such as cervical cancer. HPV-associated diseases can be prevented by consistent and effective condom use and by annual Pap smears for early detection of HPV.^{6,7}

Condoms are not effective in preventing the transmission of HIV.

The NIH report confirms that condoms are an effective public health tool in the fight against HIV infection. Another study of HIV-serodiscordant couples in Europe (one of the couples is HIV-infected and one is not), has shown no transmission to the uninfected partner among any of the 124 couples who used at every act of sexual intercourse. Among those couples that were inconsistent users of condoms, 12 percent of the uninfected partners became infected with HIV.^{6,8}

References

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