

Why Do Young People in Alaska Need Comprehensive Sex Education?

Young people deserve age-appropriate, medically accurate information about sex, reproduction, and concepts like respecting boundaries, asking before touching, and who to turn to for help.

Many students in Alaska don't have access to the information and skills they need to protect their health and safety because public schools in Alaska aren't required to provide comprehensive sex education.

The facts are clear: young people in Alaska need comprehensive sex education.

Alaska has some of the country's highest rates of sexual assault, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and unintended pregnancy. Lawmakers should focus on ensuring all young people have the tools they need to keep themselves healthy.

- We are currently experiencing a public health crisis – Alaska has extremely high rates of STIs, ranking highest in the nation for chlamydia and second highest for gonorrhea.ⁱ
- Teens and young adults are particularly vulnerable to infections: Alaska young people ages 15-19 contract chlamydia at a rate more than 3 times the state average.ⁱⁱ
- Over 40% of sexually active Alaska high school students report they did not use a condom the last time they had sex.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Alaska has a high rate of teen pregnancy, and nearly 48% of all pregnancies in Alaska are unintended.^{iv}
- In 2018, fewer than half of Alaska's secondary schools taught students how to access valid and reliable information, products, and services related to STIs and pregnancy.^v
- Alaska has the highest rate of reported rape in the country – almost 3 times the national average.^{vi}
- Child sexual assault in Alaska is estimated to be the highest in the country, with 13.7% of people in Alaska experiencing some form of childhood sexual abuse.^{vii}

Sex education is essential to young people's health, relationships, and life goals.

Sex education that is comprehensive and medically accurate is a proven strategy for improving the health and safety of young people.

- Considerable research, including from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), shows comprehensive sex education reduces sexual risk behaviors and STIs.^{viii}
- Comprehensive sex education is also associated with delayed initiation of sex, fewer sexual partners, and more widespread use of condoms and contraceptives.^{ix}
- Sex education helps teach young people what a healthy relationship looks like and gives them opportunities to practice good communication skills before they become sexually active.
- Sex education can equip young people with the skills they need for a lifetime of good health, including the ability to make decisions for themselves, think critically about the world, and be a good ally to those who are different.

Alaska's high rates of sexual assault, STIs, and unintended pregnancy demonstrate that the sex education young people currently receive in public schools is insufficient.

It is time for Alaska to adopt comprehensive sex education standards for all students.

Alaska's Young People Deserve Comprehensive Sex Education

Young people deserve to get evidence-based, medically accurate information and answers to their questions about sex and relationships, without being shamed and judged.

The overwhelming majority agrees that young people need comprehensive sex education.

- A vast majority of people support sex education, including over 90% of parents who support sex education for both middle and high school.
- Over 90% of Alaskan voters agree that sex education should be medically accurate, age-appropriate, and should cover healthy relationships, consent, and communication skills.
- In 2019, the Alaska Association of Student Governments, which is made up of high school students from across the state, passed a resolution in support of legislation and policy that implements statewide standards for comprehensive sex education.
- In 2020, Alaska Public Health Association passed a resolution in support of legislation for comprehensive sexuality education that is age-appropriate, medically accurate, and inclusive of all students.

Planned Parenthood strongly supports sex education legislation that will:

- ✓ Make comprehensive, medically and scientifically accurate, and age-appropriate sex education mandatory in all public schools K-12.
- ✓ Require the inclusion of consent and healthy relationships as part of sex education curriculum.
- ✓ Teach abstinence as the most effective means of avoiding STIs and unintended pregnancy, but not to the exclusion of instruction on other forms of contraception and disease prevention.
- ✓ Require that curriculum be inclusive for all students, regardless of gender, gender identity, race, disability status, religion, or sexual orientation.
- ✓ Requires that school districts report on the sex education they are providing so that our state can continue to improve the quality of programming in the future.

Public health authorities agree: comprehensive, medically accurate sexual health education is the best way to help young people stay healthy. It is time for Alaska to adopt comprehensive sexual health education standards for all students, based on the most current and rigorous medically accurate guidelines.

Alaska should enact strong standards for sex ed to make sure all Alaska youth get the education they need to lead healthy lives.

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- ⁱ Center for Disease Control and Prevention, *2018 STD Surveillance Report: State Ranking Tables* (2019). <https://www.cdc.gov/std/stats18/2018-Surveillance-Report-EMBARGOED-FINAL-State-Ranking-Tables.pdf>
- ⁱⁱ Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, *Complete Health Indicator Report of Chlamydia Cases* (2018). http://ibis.dhss.alaska.gov/indicator/complete_profile/ChlamCas.html; *State of Alaska Epidemiology, Bulletin: Chlamydia Infection Update* (2018), http://www.epi.alaska.gov/bulletins/docs/b2019_08.pdf (noting that in 2018, 76% of chlamydia cases in Alaska occurred for people under age 29).
- ⁱⁱⁱ Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), *State Profiles Fiscal Year 2018* (2019). <https://siecus.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Alaska-FY18-Final-1.pdf>
- ^{iv} Power to Decide, *Alaska Data* (2019), <https://powertodecide.org/what-we-do/information/national-state-data/alaska>; Kathryn Kost, Unintended Pregnancy Rates at the State Level: Estimates for 2010 and Trends Since 2002, *Guttmacher Institute*, https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/stateup10.pdf
- ^v Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), *State Profiles Fiscal Year 2018* (2019). <https://siecus.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Alaska-FY18-Final-1.pdf>
- ^{vi} Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, *Complete Health Indicator Report of Adverse Childhood Experiences: Sexual Abuse* (2017). http://ibis.dhss.alaska.gov/indicator/complete_profile/xacesexs.html
- ^{vii} Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, *Complete Health Indicator Report of Adverse Childhood Experiences: Sexual Abuse* (2017). http://ibis.dhss.alaska.gov/indicator/complete_profile/xacesexs.html
- ^{viii} Chin, H. et al., The Effectiveness of Group-Based Comprehensive Risk-Reduction and Abstinence Education Interventions to Prevent or Reduce the Risk of Adolescent Pregnancy, Human Immunodeficiency Virus, and Sexually Transmitted Infection, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 42(3): 272-294. [https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(11\)00906-8/fulltext](https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(11)00906-8/fulltext)
- ^{ix} Center for Disease Control and Prevention, *School Health Profiles – Characteristics of Health Programs Among Secondary Schools 2016*, 3 (2017). https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/profiles/pdf/2016/2016_Profiles_Report.pdf