

What is Comprehensive Sexual Health Education?

Sexual health education should be part of comprehensive health education. It must be age appropriate, medically accurate and enable students to develop the necessary knowledge and skills to make healthy and responsible decisions throughout their lives. Sexual health education addresses factors that affect sexual behavior, such as self-esteem and perceived social norms, and helps young people develop a positive view of sexuality in the context of family and community values.

Comprehensive sexual health education lessons focus on the needs of the student and center on:

- The right and responsibility of every individual regardless of age to make responsible sexual choices and avoid high risk behaviors;
- Abstaining from sexual intercourse as the best and most effective way to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS;
- Providing scientifically accurate information about the effectiveness of condoms and other birth control methods, and the importance of using protection consistently and correctly to reduce the risk of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases;
- Recognizing healthy and unhealthy relationships;
- Developing the communication and interpersonal skills to avoid and/or handle high risk situations; and
- The right and responsibility of young people to access medically accurate information and appropriate health care services.

A sexual health education program includes lessons on human anatomy, physiology and the reproductive system. It covers human sexuality and sexual identity. It discusses decision-making and responsibility in the context of personal and family values and a student's life goals. It includes lessons on healthy relationships and helps students develop communication and interpersonal skills to support their decisions and help them handle risky situations including unwanted sexual advances. As of the 2015-16 school year, high school teachers may include classroom condom demonstrations. This policy change helps ensure that teachers can provide comprehensive, evidence-based sexual health instruction, including in-class condom demonstrations, to high school students Citywide.

The NYCDOE worked with the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in order to ensure that this definition of sexual health education is based on scientific and health research. For support and guidance in providing comprehensive sexual health education, schools can utilize the DOE's recommended sexual health education curriculum (*HealthSmart Middle School* and *HealthSmart High School* plus *Reducing the Risk* for high school with NYC-specific modifications), [professional development](#) provided by the Office of School Wellness Programs, and the [New York State Education Department's Guidance Document for Achieving the NYS Standards in Health Education](#).

For more information, please visit www.schools.nyc.gov/wellness or email wellness@schools.nyc.gov.