

Pediatricians Should Provide Sex Ed, But Many Don't



By Ana-Marija Dolaskie — July 27, 2016



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The American Academy of Pediatricians (AAP) believes Sex Ed should extend beyond the classroom; in fact, the academy's [latest clinical report](#) ^[1] urges pediatricians to provide sex health information to both patients and parents or guardians. And we couldn't agree more.

According to the report, "pediatricians are in excellent position to provide and support longitudinal sexuality education to all children, adolescents, and young adults," in addition to the sex education students are already receiving in the classroom and at home. The recommendation is not a new concept, yet one out of three adolescent patients still do not receive any sex education from their pediatrician. Those who did discuss it, spent only about 40 seconds on the topic.

Indeed, abstinence is the only method that's 100 percent effective against STDs and unplanned pregnancies, but research has demonstrated that efforts to promote abstinence-only methods are not effective. Comprehensive sex education has time and time again shown its effectiveness in curbing pregnancies and STDs among adolescents. Since 1991, teen births and pregnancies in the United States have steadily decreased, with a slight increase between 2005 and 2007. Experts attribute the steady decrease of pregnancies and STDs to increased use of contraception and the implemented sex education in schools nationwide. Still, the U.S. holds the highest rates of adolescent pregnancy, with 88 percent of unintended pregnancies to teens between 15 and 17 years old. Undoubtedly, we can do better, which is why the latest AAP report should speak volumes to healthcare providers.

It should be noted that sex education is comprised of more than just teaching the anatomy and the biology of sex and reproduction. It should cover a variety of topics, including healthy sexual development, gender identity, relationships, affection, intimacy, and body image for all adolescents. The authors note that a healthy sexuality is key in reaching developmental milestones, as well as 'forming attitudes and values about consent, sexual orientation, and gender identity.'

Parents and pediatricians should work together to discuss sex education with their teens, the

report adds. The authors reviewed 12 studies that showed parents who were properly trained on how to educate adolescents about sex and sexually transmitted diseases had overall better communication with teens, compared with those parents who did not receive proper instruction. A 2013 article on how sexually active or experienced adolescents in the U.S. receive sexual health information, showed parents and teachers were the main sources for 55 percent of girls and 43 percent of boys, while only 10 percent of adolescents 15 to 19 years old received formal education from health care providers — a number that certainly needs improvement.

Often, pediatricians can start the conversation by taking a lead from a parent or caregiver to ask a few questions about how much information the family would like to receive on sexual health. The conversation dynamics can vary as the child gets older and parents can be asked to leave the room — an often comforting scenario for adolescents who may feel embarrassed to share thoughts and ask questions about sexual health in front of their parents. Pediatricians are able to provide much more personalized education to individual patients than teachers can to a classroom full of students.

Perhaps most important, pediatricians should provide information about the HPV vaccine, which protects young adults from the human papillomavirus (HPV) — the [pathogen responsible for 99.7 percent of cervical cancers](#) [2], and one of the most common sexually transmitted disease.

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