

Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health in Rhode Island schools: **THE BASICS**



What is Comprehensive Sexual Health Education?

Schools play an important role in teaching young people from an early age how to:

- ✓ identify and cultivate healthy relationships
- ✓ ask for and give consent freely
- ✓ respect and take care of one's own body
- ✓ respect the bodies of others
- ✓ develop life-skills around communication, empathy, inclusion and sensitivity to people from all backgrounds



Sexual health education, as part of a comprehensive School Health Education Program, is key.

In Rhode Island...

Sexuality education, as part of a comprehensive health curriculum, must be aligned with:

- ▶ [RI Health Education Framework](#)
- ▶ [RIDE Comprehensive Health Instructional Outcomes](#)

Topic-specific requirements (Family Life & Sexuality, HIV-AIDS, Teen Dating Violence) referenced in RI General Law are outlined in:

- ▶ [RI Rules and Regulations for School Health Programs](#)

Or for a summary of the sexual health education portions of these three documents, see:

- ▶ [RI Sexual Health Education Requirements SUMMARY \(RIHSC\)](#)



RI schools are required to teach sex education.

Sex education in RI is *part of a comprehensive school health education* program, which means it is not a stand-alone topic but is integrated with mandated health instructional outcomes like personal health, injury and disease prevention, and substance abuse prevention.

Comprehensive Sexual Health Education teaches:

SEXUALITY TOPICS

Human growth & development
Healthy & respectful relationships
Gender identity / sexual orientation
Dating violence
Consent
Communication skills
Reproduction & pregnancy prevention
Sexually transmitted infections & prevention (STIs, including HIV)
Information on access to sexual health services

&



VALUES

Respect
Inclusion
Non-discrimination
Equality
Empathy
Responsibility
Reciprocity



VALUABLE TOOL:
RightTime App



- ▶ Developed by the RI Department of Health with accurate information, resources and videos on sexual health topics
- ▶ Created with the mission of helping teenagers and people of all ages and genders to navigate an increasingly complicated information landscape surrounding sexual health, individually and anonymously
- ▶ Can direct you to clinics, counselors and experts
- ▶ Learn more and download on the [RightTime app website](#), Apple App Store or Google Play

Why is Adolescent Sexual & Reproductive Health Important?

1 Positive Health Outcomes

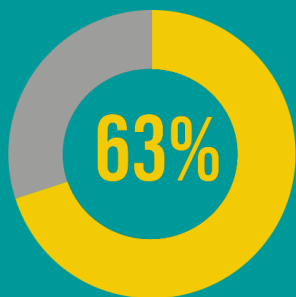
Sexual and reproductive health is a crucial component of overall health. Quality comprehensive sexual education, access to sexual health services, and an inclusive school climate promote health and well-being, respect for human rights and gender equality, and empowers young people to take control of their health to lead safe and productive lives. Schools play a critical role in providing students developmentally appropriate and medically accurate information.

2 Positive Educational Outcomes

Research has shown that there is a clear link between health-related behaviors and educational outcomes. Negative health behaviors (smoking, alcohol use, risky sexual behavior, dating violence) have a negative effect on academic performance. Providing accurate health information to children and adolescents is critical in developing lifelong healthy habits, and it gives them a greater opportunity for positive educational outcomes.

3 Reduction of STI and Teen Pregnancy Rates

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in Rhode Island, especially among young people, have increased at an alarming rate over the past 10 years. While overall sexual activity and teen pregnancy rates among RI high school students has decreased over the same period, sex without condoms is increasing, which increases STI risk. Comprehensive sexual education is one way to combat those rising numbers - teach young people about safe sex and how their unhealthy decision-making today could lead to lifelong consequences.



of chlamydia cases in 2019 were among Rhode Islanders **24 and younger**

According to the RI Department of Health*,

Incidences of the following in the past 10 years (8 years for teen pregnancy) among all Rhode Islanders.....

+244%



Syphilis

+421%



Gonorrhea

+64%



Chlamydia**

-39%



Teen Pregnancy

*Rhode Island HIV, Sexually Transmitted Diseases, Viral Hepatitis, and Tuberculosis Surveillance Report 2019, Adolescent Sexual Health 2020 Data Brief

**Rhode Island Ranks #1 in New England for chlamydia rates

How Can Adolescent Sexual & Reproductive Health Be Improved in Schools?

ASSESSMENT IS THE FIRST STEP IN ANY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition, in cooperation with the RI Department of Health, has developed an easy-to-use assessment tool called the [Adolescent Sexual & Reproductive Health Assessment Tool](#). The tool will identify areas in need of improvement and help prioritize ways to improve, providing assistance in the accompanying [Resource Sheets](#). For each section of the Assessment Tool, the Resource Sheets address relevant Rhode Island law, action steps for improvement and other helpful links and resources.

This tool is based on the [School Health Index](#) (SHI), a national self-assessment tool developed by the CDC and fully aligned with the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model.



The SHI is recommended as a critical first step in improving the implementation of policies, programs or strategies to improve health education in schools. The SHI is 248 pages long and contains 11 modules, covering 7 health topics. It is comprehensive, but can be overwhelming, especially if you're looking at one specific topic, such as Sexual & Reproductive Health.

The [Adolescent Sexual & Reproductive Health Assessment Tool](#) is adapted from the SHI and informed by RI laws, regulations, and School Health Profiles data. It has 26 questions in 5 sections, each containing questions on Policy, Practice and Professional Development. Tools and additional information about [adolescent sexual health](#) can be accessed on the [RIHSC website](#).

SCHOOLS WANT HELP!



Every other year, The Rhode Island Department of Education administers (in collaboration with the CDC) the *School Health Profiles* (surveys to principal and lead health teachers).

School Health Profiles help identify trends, characteristics, practices and policies related to school health programs.

Relevant highlights from the *2018 School Health Profiles* indicate:

- ▶ **High need** (and high number of requests) for professional development on sex education, especially around prevention and teaching strategies that meet the needs of LGBTQ+ students
- ▶ **High need** for help in communicating about health education (including sex ed) with families
- ▶ **High need** for improving referral policies and practices associated with sexual health