



Department of Health
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Dear Rhode Island Association of School Committees members:

According to U.S. Department of Education statistics, schools have direct contact with students for at least 6 hours a day during the most critical years of their social, physical, and intellectual development. School health policies, practices and support systems, therefore, play a key role in reducing the prevalence of health risk behaviors among youth and have been shown to have a positive effect on academic performance.

The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) is pleased to partner with the Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition to support efforts to prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV and unintended pregnancies among adolescents and teens in Rhode Island. Although this topic can be sensitive and sometimes difficult to discuss, open dialogue about providing youth with the best possible information, resources, and support is important when addressing adolescent sexual health. Young people have the potential to take responsibility for their sexual health when given accurate, age-appropriate information and tools, such as those found on RIDOH's RIGhtTime sexual health app.

Adolescent behaviors are influenced at the individual, peer, family, school, community and societal levels. We must all work together to take action on the latest health data in our state, especially regarding the rise of STIs among youth. It is our collective obligation as adults who value the health of our communities to ensure that Rhode Island youth have access to comprehensive sexual health education, increased access to youth-friendly health services and greater support for safe school environments where everyone is treated respectfully.

Our top priority at RIDOH is to make *all* Rhode Island communities healthier. Every person in every community in Rhode Island deserves an equal opportunity to be healthy, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, ZIP code, race, ethnicity, level of education, or level of income. This commitment must include a focus on STI prevention and education for adolescents. Our young people deserve to live in communities that help them make healthy decisions as they grow and mature.

Thank you for your on-going support, and for your phenomenal work to promote the health and wellness of young people throughout Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Nicole Alexander-Scott".

Nicole Alexander-Scott, MD, MPH
Director, Rhode Island Department of Health

