

Text-mailing used to teach sex health

April 26 2006

San Francisco health officials are starting a new program to get sex education advice to young people by sending them text messages.

The city's Department of Public Health began a program this week -- the first of its kind in the United States -- offering automated sex education and health advice to people via their cell phones.

All someone has to do is send a text message with "sexinfo" in the message to two phone numbers set up within the health department.

The text message generates an automatic reply, prompting people to choose from a variety of topic options ranging from peer pressure to broken condoms.

The text conversation usually ends with solutions, including a phone number to call and location and hours of area health clinics.

"A lot of teenagers don't go to clinics, they're afraid to ask questions," said 22-year-old Michelle Irving, a peer educator with the city health department.

She said this gives people, especially within the programs 12-to-24 target age range, a more private option for seeking help or advice.

The program, modeled after one in London, will cost San Francisco about \$2,500 a month to run.

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Citation: Text-mailing used to teach sex health (2006, April 26) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2006-04-text-mailing-sex-health.html>

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