

U.S. adolescents are receiving less sex education in key topics than 25 years ago

November 4 2021, by Patti Verbanas



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Only half of young people in the United States are getting sex education that meets minimum standards, according to a Rutgers researcher who found that adolescents are not receiving critical information. Of even greater concern is that a significant percentage of young people do not receive any information about birth control and sexually transmitted

disease prevention before they begin to have sexual intercourse.

The study, published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* and conducted in collaboration with the Guttmacher Institute, also found significant gender and racial disparities in adolescents' access to comprehensive sex education. Females were more likely than males to report receiving instruction in waiting until marriage to have sex, while males were more likely than females to report instruction in condom use. The study also found that significantly fewer Black and Hispanic males than White males received instruction in saying no to sex, birth control and HIV and STI prevention. Queer youth were less likely than their straight peers to report instruction about HIV/STI prevention and where to get birth control.

And while religious institutions in the United States play a central role in sex education for many adolescents, teens that report religious settings as their main source are not receiving any information about birth control.

"The findings show that most adolescents are not receiving sex education that will enable them to manage their sexual lives," said Leslie M. Kantor, professor and chair of the Department of Urban-Global Public Health at the Rutgers School of Public Health. "Of even more concern is that young people of color and queer youth are receiving less sex education and males and females are receiving different messages. Policymakers at every level must invest in inclusive and comprehensive sex education programs with an eye toward greater equity and inclusivity."

In the study, the researchers looked at data from 7,946 adolescents in the National Survey of Family Growth from 2011–2015 and 2015–2019 to examine changes in formal sex education by gender and race/ethnicity for content, timing and location of instruction.

More than 75 percent of adolescents received instruction about "how to say no to sex," versus about 60 percent who received instruction about birth control. In 1995, more than 80 percent of young people reported receiving information about birth control.

"The United States is failing adolescents and their families by providing limited sex education to so many of its youth," adds Kantor. "Federal, state and local policy makers must work harder to ensure that sex education is provided that is age appropriate and that education is equitable and meets the needs of all youth rather than leaving some youth less equipped to lead sexually healthy lives."

More information: Laura D. Lindberg et al, Adolescents' Receipt of Sex Education in a Nationally Representative Sample, 2011–2019, *Journal of Adolescent Health* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2021.08.027](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2021.08.027)

Provided by Rutgers University

Citation: U.S. adolescents are receiving less sex education in key topics than 25 years ago (2021, November 4) retrieved 15 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-11-adolescents-sex-key-topics-years.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.