

Doctors don't provide sexual health info to teens

12 June 2013, by Glenda Fauntleroy



Most sexually active teens don't get information about sexual health from their health care providers, finds a new study in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*. Furthermore, nearly one in five sexually active boys reported receiving no information about birth control or condoms from parents or teachers.

"The optimal goal is for teens to receive sexual health information from parents, schools, and health care providers because past studies show that information from multiple reliable sources is associated with [improved health](#) outcomes for teens," said study co-author Laura Duberstein Lindberg, Ph.D., of the Guttmacher Institute in New York.

Lindberg and her colleagues used data from the 2006–2010 [National Survey](#) of Family Growth and evaluated responses from almost 1,900 sexually experienced 15–19 year olds. The teens were asked whether they had received sexual health information (SHI) on birth control, sexually transmitted infections (STI) including HIV, and condoms from their parents, teachers, or health care providers.

[Parents and teachers](#) were the most commonly cited sources of information about birth control for 55 percent of females and 43 percent of males. For STI/HIV information, 59 percent female and 66 percent male adolescents reported parents and teachers as sources. Only about one-third of teens who got birth control information from parents and teachers also reported their health care provider as a source.

The study showed that health care providers were the least common source of sexual health information.

"Health care providers have more limited time with teens than parents or teachers," Lindberg explained. "However, national guidelines call for [healthcare providers](#) to offer contraceptive information and counseling to all sexually active teens and this study finds that goal is not being met. Just like many parents, physicians are not always comfortable discussing sexual health topics."

Lindberg and her colleagues found that while the teens believed all three groups were "important and desirable sources" for sexual health information, few get information from all three sources and many do not get it from more than one source.

Kathy Woodward, M.D., director of the Adolescent Health Program at Children's National Medical Center in Washington, D.C., agreed that parents, teachers, and physicians working together constitute a comprehensive approach to reproductive health in teens.

"Parents are indispensable in reinforcing positive [sexual health](#) and have the highest influence on teens," she said. "They facilitate healthcare, endorse and foster trust in the medical system and many teens wouldn't trust their [health care providers](#) without that input."

"For parents who don't discuss this kind of information with their child, it is important to know that they can go to their teacher or doctor with questions," Woodward added.

More information: Donaldson, A. and Lindberg, L. Receipt of sexual health information from parents, teachers, and healthcare providers by sexually experienced US adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. June, 2013.

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