

Sex and STI/HIV Education

BACKGROUND: As the level of concern over teenage pregnancy—and later AIDS—increased in the 1970s and 1980s, so did the number of states that had policies requiring or encouraging the teaching of sex education. Most states require that public schools teach some form of sex or STI/HIV education. Most states, including some that do not mandate the instruction itself, also place requirements on how abstinence or contraception should be handled when included in a school district’s curriculum. This guidance is heavily weighted toward stressing abstinence; in contrast, while many states allow or require that contraception be covered, none requires that it be stressed. In an attempt to ensure that students receive truthful and appropriate information, several states require that education on sex and STI/HIV be “medically accurate” and/or appropriate for the age of the students. Further affecting whether students receive instruction on sex or STIs/HIV are parental consent requirements or the more frequent “opt-out” clauses, which allow parents to remove students from instruction the parents find objectionable.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- 21 states and the District of Columbia mandate that public schools teach sex education; many states, including several that do not mandate sex education, place requirements on how abstinence and contraception are treated when taught.
 - 22 states require that abstinence be stressed when taught as part of sex education; 12 states require simply that it be covered during instruction.
 - 17 states and the District of Columbia require that sex education programs cover contraception; no state requires that it be stressed.
- 35 states and the District of Columbia require the provision of STI/HIV education; many place requirements on how abstinence and contraception are treated.
 - 25 states require that abstinence be stressed when taught as part of STD/HIV education; 12 require that it be covered.
 - 19 states require that STI/HIV programs cover contraception; no state requires that it be stressed.
- 29 states and the District of Columbia require that sex and/or STI/HIV education be medically accurate and/or age appropriate.
 - 15 states require that programs teach medically accurate and factual information.
 - 27 states and the District of Columbia require that the education be appropriate for the students’ age.
- 37 states and the District of Columbia require school districts to permit parental involvement in sexuality and STI/HIV education.
 - 3 states require parental consent in order for students to participate in sex or STI/HIV education.
 - 35 states and the District of Columbia allow parents to remove their children from instruction.



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STATE SEX AND STI/HIV EDUCATION POLICY

STATE	SEX EDUCATION			STI/HIV EDUCATION			EDUCATION MUST BE:		PARENTAL ROLE	
	Mandated	If Taught, Content Required		Mandated	If Taught, Content Required		Medically Accurate	Age Appropriate	Consent Required	Opt-out Permitted
		Abstinence	Contraception		Abstinence	Contraception				
Alabama		Stress	Cover	X	Stress	Cover		X		X*
Arizona		Stress			Stress		HIV only	X	X†	X†
Arkansas		Stress			Stress					
California		Cover	Cover	X	Cover	Cover	X	X		X
Colorado		Stress	Cover		Stress		X	X		X
Connecticut		Cover		X						X
Delaware	X	Cover	Cover	X	Cover	Cover				
Dist. of Columbia	X		Cover	X				X		X
Florida	X	Cover		X				HIV only		X
Georgia	X	Cover		X	Cover					X
Hawaii	X	Stress	Cover	X	Stress	Cover	X	X		
Idaho										X
Illinois		Stress‡			Stress‡	Cover‡		X		X
Indiana		Stress		X	Stress					
Iowa	X			X			X	X		X
Kansas	X			X						
Kentucky	X	Cover		X	Cover					
Louisiana		Stress			Stress					X
Maine	X	Stress	Cover	X	Stress	Cover	X	X		X
Maryland	X	Cover	Cover	X	Cover	Cover		X		X
Massachusetts										X*
Michigan		Stress		X	Stress		X	X		X
Minnesota	X			X	Cover					X
Mississippi ^Ω		Stress			Stress			X		X
Missouri		Stress		X	Stress		X	X		X
Montana	X	Cover		X	Cover		X	X		
Nevada	X			X				X	X	
New Hampshire				X	Cover					X
New Jersey	X			X				X		X*
New Mexico	X	Cover	Cover	X	Stress	Cover				X
New York				X	Stress	Cover		HIV only		X†
North Carolina	X	Stress	Cover	X	Stress	Cover	X	X		
Ohio				X	Stress					X
Oklahoma		Stress		X	Cover	Cover	HIV only			X
Oregon	X	Stress	Cover	X	Stress	Cover	X	X		X
Pennsylvania				X	Stress			HIV only		X*,†
Rhode Island	X	Stress	Cover	X	Stress	Cover	X	X		X
South Carolina	X	Stress	Cover	X	Stress	Cover		X		X
South Dakota ^Φ										
Tennessee	X	Stress		X	Stress					X
Texas		Stress			Stress			X		X
Utah [◇]	X	Stress		X	Stress		X		X	
Vermont	X	Cover	Cover	X	Cover	Cover		X		X*
Virginia		Cover	Cover		Cover	Cover		X		X
Washington		Stress	Cover	X	Stress	Cover	X	X		X
West Virginia	X	Cover	Cover	X	Cover	Cover				X
Wisconsin		Stress	Cover	X	Stress	Cover		X		X
TOTAL	22 +DC			35+DC			15	27+DC	3	35+DC

* Parents' removal of student must be based on religious or moral beliefs.

† In AZ, NY and PA, opt-out is only permitted for STI education, including instruction on HIV; in AZ, parental consent is required only for sex education.

‡ IL has a broad set of laws mandating general health education, including abstinence; a more specific second law requires a school district that provides sex education to stress abstinence and to provide statistics on the efficacy of condoms as HIV/STI prevention.

Ω Localities may override state requirements for sex education topics, including abstinence; state prohibits including material that "contradicts the required components."

Φ Abstinence is taught within state-mandated character education.

◇ State prohibits teachers from responding to students' spontaneous questions in ways that conflict with the law's requirements.

CONTINUED

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

For information on state legislative and policy activity click on Guttmacher's [Monthly State Update](#) and for state level information and data on reproductive health issues, click on Guttmacher's [State Center](#).

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