

# What are the benefits of Comprehensive Sexual Health Education?

There is a robust body of evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of comprehensive sexual health education (CSHE) in improving positive attitudes and activities related to sexual health.

## Research shows that CSHE results in:

### Delayed onset of sexual activity

Contrary to what some may believe, talking about sexual health does **not** encourage students to have sex earlier. Young people who receive high quality CSHE are shown to delay the onset of sexual activity until later in life. CSHE reduces the number of young people having sex.

### Increased condom use

There is strong evidence to show that students who receive CSHE use contraceptives (including condoms) more frequently and effectively. School-based CSHE also leads to less frequently reported sex without a condom and overall lower sexual risk-taking behaviours.

### Reduced unintended pregnancies

Robust CSHE programs lead to a decrease in teenage pregnancies and abortions. An established body of research shows that CSHE contributes to fewer unintended adolescent pregnancies. Students have the knowledge of how to use contraceptives effectively, where to access them, and are empowered to do so in their sexual relationships.

### Lower number of sexual partners

Young people report having fewer sexual partners when they are taught about sexual health in a holistic, positive way. CSHE empowers students to decide if, when and whom they engage in sexual activity with.

### Reduced risk of sexually transmitted infections

When young people learn how to effectively prevent STIs through condom use and reducing their number of sexual partners, this leads to a reduction in their risk of STIs and HIV.

### Empowerment around sexual and reproductive health

CSHE builds life skills that benefit both sexual health and overall wellbeing. CSHE results in higher self-efficacy, self-esteem, confidence, decision-making, and negotiation skills in students. These important life skills help students navigate healthy sexual health choices (including consent) and have lifelong impacts.

### Prevention and reduction of gender and sexual violence

Research demonstrates that CSHE programs that address and challenge gender norms are shown to reduce risk factors for relationship violence, encourage conversations (disclosures) about sexual violence and abuse, and can reduce partner and gender-based violence.

### What about **abstinence-based** sexual health education?

Abstinence-based sexual health education commonly involves teaching students to refrain from engaging in sexual activities and/or intercourse, usually until marriage. Research clearly shows that abstinence-only sexual health education:

- Is **not** effective in delaying the onset of sexual activity.
- Does **not** reduce unplanned pregnancies.
- Does **not** result in students reducing their number of sexual partners.
- Often ignores and marginalizes LGBTQ2S+ students.
- Stigmatizes young people who are sexually active or pregnant.
- Withholds vital, medically accurate information about sexual health, pregnancy, abortions and STIs.
- Leads to higher rates of sexual activity, unplanned pregnancies and STIs in young people.

#### References:

1. Federal Centre for Health Education (2020). Comprehensive Sexuality Education – Factsheet Series.
2. SIECCAN. (2020). Questions & Answers: Sexual Health Education in Schools and Other Settings.
3. UNESCO (2018). Review of the evidence on sexuality education. Report to inform the update of the UNESCO International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education.
4. UNESCO (2018). International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach (Revised edition).
5. Action Canada (2020). The State of Sex-Ed in Canada.