

Comprehensive Sexual Education Keeps Our Kids Safe

by [The Opportunity Agenda](#)



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With **Chlamydia 51 times more prevalent than Swine Flu**, it's time for universal access to comprehensive sexual education.

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We teach our kids to wash their hands during flu season, we teach them to wear a seat belt in the car, we teach them not to talk to strangers. We do these things in order to give our children the knowledge to protect themselves and achieve all that they are capable of. Part of ensuring that American children have access to the opportunity is ensuring their safety.

However, there is one kind of health about which parents are more reluctant to teach their kids-- sexual health. No parent wants to see his or her child "grow up too quickly." Even the thought of a sexually transmitted infection harming one's "little boy" or "little girl" can be overwhelming. However, the reality of the sexual health of America's youth suggests that action needs to be taken to provide the tools to keep America's children safe. For example, Lee Che Leong, Director of the Teen Health Initiative of the New York Civil Liberties Union made an **official statement** on the dire state of New York City's health education system in 2007:

In our work... we hear countless tales from students who are not receiving the basic knowledge necessary to understand, much less protect, their health. The questions we field from teens reveal the sad state of sexuality education in New York City public schools. We've heard sexually active teens ask what penetration is, if emergency contraception is abortion, and *whether douching with Coke prevents pregnancy*.

Not only is there a need for comprehensive sexual education, research shows that there is popular support. For example, the ACLU tells us:

A 1999 nationally representative survey of 7th-12th grade teachers in the five specialties most often responsible for sex education found that a strong majority believed that sexuality education courses should cover birth control methods (93.4%), factual information about abortion (89%), where to go for birth control (88.8%), the correct way to use a condom.

Such research shows that these educators understand the value and the need for keeping kids safe. In the nation where, according to **Advocates for Youth and Public Health Reports** the median age for engaging in sexual activity is 17, compared to a median age of marriage of 25.8 for women and 27.4 for men, abstinence-until-marriage programs are simply not realistic, nor do they reflect American culture.

All of America's children deserve to be healthy, and comprehensive sexual education is integral to this goal. Sexual health classes should respect cultural differences and religious beliefs while making health a top priority. This means teaching students about contraception and STD's, including HIV, and empowering students to talk to their partners and their parents about what can be life-altering decisions. In 2007, the CDC recorded **1,108,374 cases of Chlamydia** in the United States, compared to **21,499 cases of H1N1**, or Swine Flu. If we taught our kids as much about Chlamydia as we did about the Swine Flu, it might not continue to be more than 51 times as prevalent.