



# News Release

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## COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION PROTECTS TEENS

Abstinence education is part of—but not all—the information teens need to prevent unwanted pregnancies and STDs, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics

**Washington, D.C.**—The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), representing more than 60,000 pediatricians, today urged Congress to support sexuality education for adolescents that includes both abstinence *and* medically-sound information about ways to prevent pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

In a hearing on abstinence-only programs before the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Margaret A. Blythe, MD, FAAP, FSAM, testified on behalf of the AAP that limiting teens to only learning about abstinence could do more harm than good. “Abstinence-only programs are not only ineffective,” Blythe told lawmakers, “but (they) may cause harm by providing inadequate and inaccurate information... resulting in participants failure to use safer sex practices once intercourse is initiated.”

That information is particularly crucial now, Blythe said, pointing to two recent studies that show that teen girls in particular are failing to protect themselves adequately. A new Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study shows that teen births recently rose for the first time in 14 years; a second CDC study found that one out of every four 14- to 19-year-old girl has at least one sexually transmitted disease. These studies “really demand a change in policy for funding sexual health education for adolescents,” Blythe said in testimony also endorsed by the Society for Adolescent Medicine.

The AAP supports age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education, which includes information about abstinence and contraceptives. Countering critics of federal funding for broader sexuality education curriculum, Blythe said learning about safer sex does not prompt teens to become sexually active at a younger age, more often or with more partners.

“The data is clear that abstinence is the most effective means of birth control and prevention of STIs,” Blythe said. “But abstinence should not be taught as the only strategy... Children and adolescents need accurate and comprehensive education about sexuality to practice healthy sexual behaviors as adults, but also to avoid early, exploitative or risky sexual activity that may lead to health and social problems.”

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*The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 60,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety and well being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults.*