PROVIDING EFFECTIVE SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION DURING COVID-19:

SUGGESTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

This brief guide is designed to assist educators in providing youth with the information and skills they need to protect and enhance their sexual health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The COVID-19 pandemic presents new and distinct challenges to the sexual health and well-being of young people. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic reinforces the importance of taking a trauma-informed approach to sexual health education. This means recognizing that youth's mental health, sexual health, and well-being will be impacted by both COVID-19 and non-COVID related stressors and experiences (e.g., gender-based violence).

- The pandemic has forced many educators to deliver sexual health education to their students online rather than in-person in classrooms.

ADAPTING SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION TO ADDRESS THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

The first step in providing effective sexual health education during the COVID-19 pandemic is to assess the degree to which students have been receiving sexual health education since the pandemic began in March 2020.

Sexual health education content that was originally planned for 2020 may have been disrupted due to lockdowns and/or school closures. Educators may wish to review and reinforce key educational messages that may have been missed.

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RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

For adolescents, common romantic and sexual behaviours increase the risk of getting and passing COVID-19. Educators can:

- Help students to identify which sexual behaviours are higher or lower risk for getting or passing COVID-19 (e.g., kissing someone that you don't live with is higher risk for COVID-19; physical closeness or sexual activity with a consenting partner that you live with is lower risk; masturbating alone is the safest option).

- Discuss the importance of communication and consent in establishing physical boundaries and navigating COVID-19 guidelines.

- Encourage youth to connect safely with their peers and dating partners. Discuss physical guidelines and give specific examples of how they can connect with peers and partners while still following public health guidelines and their own household and school rules:
  - Online dating
  - Video chats
  - Phone calls/texting
  - Seeing friends and dating partners outside (e.g., while wearing masks, going for physically distant walks or bike rides).

- Promote social connection with friends and partners by encouraging students to practice on and use social media platforms that most closely resemble in-person interactions (e.g., Zoom, Facetime).

- Emphasize digital communication skills development to help students navigate relationships and conflict resolution; support students in learning how to use online platforms for social connection; encourage students to learn about the privacy levels of the platforms that they are using.

ACCESSING SEXUAL HEALTH AND OTHER SUPPORT SERVICES

The COVID-19 pandemic may result in some students being at higher risk for gender-based violence and sexual assault. Students may also be experiencing reduced access to condoms and other contraceptives, as well as health services that impact their sexual and reproductive health (e.g., access to sexually transmitted infection [STI] testing and services).

Educators can review locally available services in their area and provide students with links to:

- Accessible STI testing/treatment services

- Accessible reproductive health care services (e.g., pregnancy care, abortion care)

- Accessible gender-based violence support services

- LGBTQ2ISNA+ support services

> **LGBTQI2SNA+:** Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, Two-Spirit, nonbinary, asexual, and other emerging identities.

IN THE SCHOOLS

If school-based LGBTQ2ISNA+ support services (e.g., Gay-Straight Alliances) are no longer able to run in person, consider moving these groups/meetings online.

If the HPV vaccination program at your school has been paused, ensure that students and parents/guardians are aware that they may have to wait for the HPV vaccine or access it elsewhere within their community.

PROVIDING SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION REMOTELY/ONLINE

Providing youth with a safe and supportive learning environment is important when teaching sexual health education online and/or remotely.

To create a safe, effective, and supportive online learning space:

ESTABLISH CLEAR RULES AND BOUNDARIES

Have students participate in the development of rules and boundaries (e.g., respecting each other and respecting different values, using inclusive language, keeping classroom discussions confidential, understanding that it is okay to ask questions or to pass on questions).

MODERATE ONLINE DISCUSSIONS AMONG STUDENTS

Ensure that the online space is free from harassment. Examples of online harassment include using the online space to spread rumours or make fun of someone, harassment during live chats, sending threatening or abusive messages, and encouraging other people to send threatening or abusive messages.

PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS TO ANONYMOUSLY ASK QUESTIONS

Do an online version of the "**question box**" where students are encouraged to ask any question that they have about sexual health.

In some cases, students might feel more comfortable learning about sexual health education remotely (e.g., in an online space and/or at home) as it allows them to engage in more anonymous and/or confidential ways (e.g., the ability to turn their camera off if they feel stressed or embarrassed).

LINK STUDENTS TO CREDIBLE, ONLINE AND/OR PRINTED SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION RESOURCES

DO NOT ASSUME THAT ALL STUDENTS HAVE A PRIVATE LOCATION AT HOME OR RELIABLE INTERNET ACCESS

INFORM PARENTS/GUARDIANS IN ADVANCE

Tell parents/guardians that sexual health education will be provided and include basic information about the topics that will be taught and discussed in the online classroom. This can give parents/guardians the opportunity to plan for extra support or to navigate their physical space in a way that works for their household (e.g., if other family members work in the same room). Sending information and links to parents/guardians may also help them to support their children.

PLAN FOR DISRUPTIONS

Develop a plan for instances when individual students leave the lesson or programming abruptly. Possible reasons for leaving may include the student feeling uncomfortable with the material or a parent/guardian walking into the room unexpectedly. Educators may want to follow-up with the student directly.

USE A RANGE OF METHODS

Consider using a broad range of technology-based methods for the delivery of sexual health education content (e.g., videos, games, podcasts, blogs, websites, anonymous online quizzes and polls).

RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS

SIECCAN's Sexual Health Education Promising Practices Portal. The Portal is an online directory of sexual health education resources for educators: https://sieccan.org/promising-practices-portal

Adapting Sexual Health Education Programming During the Pandemic: https://www.unfpa.org/resources/adapting-comprehensive-sexuality-education-programming-during-covid-19-pandemic

AMAZE: https://amaze.org/educators/

CATIE-Sex and COVID-19: https://www.catie.ca/en/sex-and-covid-19

MediaSmarts: https://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources

Sex Education in the Digital Era: https://www.ids.ac.uk/publications/sex-education-in-the-digital-era/

SIECCAN/Trojan Sexual Health & COVID-19 Fact Sheet: http://sieccan.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Trojan-SIECCAN-Sexual-Health-and-COVID-19.pdf

See SIECCAN's accompanying document titled *Youth, COVID-19, and Sexual Health: Background Information for Educators.* **www.covideducatorbackgrounder.ca**

RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

COVID RESOURCES

SIECCAN's COVID Factsheet for Elementary students: Friendships, Relationships, & COVID-19: Things to Think About www.covidelementaryfactsheet.ca

SIECCAN's COVID Factsheet for Secondary students: Relationships, Sexual Health, & COVID-19: What Do I Need to Know? www.covidsecondaryfactsheet.ca

COVID-19: Kids, Here's What You Need to Know: https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19/resources-parents-children/kids-need-know.html

SEXUAL HEALTH RESOURCES

About Sex (secondary aged students): https://gem.cbc.ca/season/about-sex/season-1/e4b809ed-4e24-43b6-9f7f-cffc94583db9

Action Canada- Young People and Sexuality: https://www.actioncanadashr.org/resources/sexual-health-info/hub/young-people-all-things-sexuality

Centre for Sexuality: https://www.centreforsexuality.ca/sexual-health-info/

Every Body Curious (elementary aged students): https://everybodycurious.com/

Scarleteen: https://www.scarleteen.com/

Sex & U: https://www.sexandu.ca/