

Protecting your students' futures...

Sign Up for Fall Programs Now!

Healthy Futures is now accepting scheduling requests by schools and youth-serving organizations for its programs promoting abstinence for Fall 2004. Don't miss the chance to get your first choice of dates! Programs are available for 6th-12th grade students, as well as an evening program for parents. In addition, staff or other adult trainings can be arranged. Contact 617-929-1037 or www.healthy-futures.org for more information.



Dear Reader,

We're excited to introduce you to the adolescent sexual health newsletter of Healthy Futures. We hope that you enjoy reading it and that it is useful to you in your work and interactions with teens.

For those of you who are new to Healthy Futures, we are an education program promoting sexual health through abstinence to youth in Greater Boston and Lowell. Our mission is:

- ◆ To empower teens to fully enjoy their lives, respect themselves and their bodies, and further their dreams;
- ◆ To provide relationship education to help teens have healthy, fulfilling relationships; and
- ◆ To equip teens with the skills necessary to avoid the social, psychological and health consequences of sexual activity outside of a faithful, lifelong relationship.

The classroom-based components of Healthy Futures are typically provided through middle and high school health classes, but are also available to community and faith organizations. For more information about Healthy Futures, or to schedule a presentation, visit our website: www.healthy-futures.org.

This issue highlights the growing concern about adolescent sexual behavior, specifically regarding oral sex and the sexual climate many teens face today. I am often surprised by how many times we have to explain the definition of sexual activity to teens before many of them understand that we mean any genital touching. This is something they seem to need to hear over and over again.

We are looking for input on this newsletter. If you are interested in contributing an article or have suggestions for topics you'd like to see covered in future issues, please let us know.

Sincerely,

Rebecca M. Ray, MPH
Healthy Futures Program Director

Teens Speak out about the Sexual Climate of their Schools

In February, Lifetime aired the premiere of "She's too Young", a film portraying the extreme sexual climate many teens face today. The story takes viewers into the lives of three wealthy, suburban middle school girls, where sex and alcohol play major roles in most teen gatherings. One of the girls discovers she has syphilis, and the repercussions are severe. In tracing where the syphilis came from to treat all people who have been exposed, almost the entire school is implicated. Along with seeing the lives and choices of the main characters, viewers experience three very different styles of parenting—the "best friend" parent, the concerned and protective parent, and the religious extremist who is in denial of her daughter's lifestyle. Although the film seems designed for shock value, there was a fascinating discussion board on Lifetime's website in the days following the premiere. Particularly of interest were the comments from teens, several of which are included below.

◆ **The best movies about teen sex out there- Corey0208**

I think "She's Too Young" is the best movie about teen sex out there. Finally someone has opened the eyes of a lot of people about how hard it really is to be a teenager. Not only being a teenager myself but also being a guy has really opened my eyes about having sex and how risky it really is. I feel this movie should be shown in high schools across the country. Because to be honest it really is the truth.

Continued on page 3

Our Staff



Back Row (left to right): Adam Bakun, David Lee, Steven McIntosh, Travis Stiles
Front Row (left to right): Michaiiah Young, Paulea Mooney-McCoy, Becky Hollo, Rebecca Ray

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Educator Spotlight...



Paulea Mooney-McCoy
Healthy Futures Educator

HF: Why do you work in the field of abstinence education?

Paulea: I've been working with teenagers for a long time, and I feel like they need to hear the whole truth about how to make healthy sexual and relationship choices. I've seen the devastating effects of poor choices, so it's part of my life work to help kids make the best choices for their lives.

HF: What do you enjoy the most about your job?

Paulea: I love the classroom teaching. I love seeing the light bulbs go off in the students' heads when something really connects with them. It's very rewarding to hear how their attitudes have been changed about the things we talk to them about.

HF: What did you find most surprising about this work when you started?

Paulea: How open the kids were. I didn't think they would take this message seriously, but they do. It's also surprising just how much impact you can have in one week's time.

HF: What is the most important message you tell youth?

Paulea: That the choices they make now affect their lives later. They have to think about what they want in their lives, and then how they can get there. We frame the whole topic of sex with the students' goals and dreams. It's an important way to get students to think about all this personally.

HF: What message would you like to get to teachers, health professionals, and other adults who care about youth?

Paulea: Not to be afraid to take a stand for what really is best and healthiest for young people. And not to think that kids don't listen to what adults tell them about making good choices for their lives.

Oral Sex & STDs

For much of our culture, oral sex is a taboo topic—something too private and personal to discuss openly—but that silence has resulted in a dangerous lack of knowledge. To protect the health and safety of teens you care about, you need to know the risks of oral sex.

What Is It and Who's Doing It?

Oral sex is contact of one person's mouth or tongue with the genitals of another person. Oral sex is fairly common among American adults. In a national survey from the early 1990s, three out of four adults said that they had tried oral sex. One out of four said they practiced oral sex the last time they had sex.¹

Due to understandable sensitivities, there are fewer data available about how common the practice is among teenagers. Anecdotes from educators and counselors suggest that oral sex is becoming common in both middle school and high school, even among many who consider themselves virgins. In one study of 12- to 15-year-olds, about one of every six students said they had tried oral sex.² In a study of senior high students, more than four out of five non-virgins and one out of five virgins had tried oral sex.³

Is It Sex and Is it Safe?

There is widespread confusion about whether oral sex is sex. If sexual activity is defined as bodily contact meant to give or derive sexual gratification, then it is clear that oral sex is sex. Another misconception about oral sex is that it's "safe." This is a dangerous myth. Although pregnancy is not an issue with oral sex, a wide variety of STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) can be spread through oral sex. Some of them are painful. Some of them are untreatable. And some of them can be deadly. The table below explains the relationship between oral sex and several STDs.

STD	Transmission through Oral Sex	Mode of Transmission	Other Information
Syphilis	Moderately easy	Contact with infected skin lesions	Oral sex has played an important role in a number of recent outbreaks. ^{4,5,6}
Gonorrhea	Easy	Contact with infectious fluids	Throat infections from oral sex are relatively common ⁷ and usually do not cause symptoms.
Genital Herpes	Easy	Contact with infected skin or skin lesions	Can cause oral infections that can then be spread by non-sexual activities like kissing. Can be spread even without visible sores.
HIV	Difficult	Contact with infected blood or body fluid	<1% ⁹ to 7% ¹⁰ of new cases are attributable to oral sex.

Conclusion

Despite widespread misconceptions, oral sex is risky sexual activity that puts participants at risk for a number of STDs. Abstinence from sexual activity—including oral sex—or lifetime faithfulness to one uninfected partner is the only certain way to avoid being infected.

**The information for this article was modified from Oral Sex & STDs, a Medical Institute fact sheet that can be found on their website, www.medinstitute.org. Used with permission.

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Teens Speak out about the Sexual Climate at their Schools Continued...

◆ Not Exaggerated- annie8954

I thought the movie was ace! It was definitely not exaggerated. When I was a freshman, the girls in my class who I was on the soccer team with decided to have a "sex contest." The concept was to see who could hook up with the most guys (there was even a point system set up: 5 points for a threesome, 4 points for sex with one person, 3 for oral, etc.)... I joined in to have them like me more and think I was cool. Probably the biggest mistake of my life. Rumors started to go around, and eventually the administration found out. We had to get tested for a bunch of STD's. It was horrible, but not as horrible as living with a reputation which we all still have.

◆ Cool Movie- horselover1

I'm 13 years old, and [this movie] relates to what people my age go through every day. Believe it or not, some of my friends have already lost their virginity. This movie made me think about the values of keeping my virginity. So, thanks!

◆ LittleNikki

I'm a 15-year-old girl and can relate to the movie. My boyfriend and I sometimes try and stop having sex, but it's hard. And really it's not what everyone makes it out to be. To the moms and dads, grandparents— talk to your kids. Give us space, but talk to us. We listen to you whether you think it or not. And to the girls who are still virgins, it is so much better to wait! Take a young girls advice on this!

◆ Personally.... -TigereyeFairmoon

I thought that this movie did a wonderful job of waking older people up. I'm 17, and what I saw in that movie was not exaggerated... That stuff really does happen.... Girls do have sex with numerous guys, and let other people watch. My friend gave [oral sex] to tons of guys in the same room. She stopped because she almost got raped by the guys. I have another friend who became popular because she gave [oral sex] to those same guys, last year in the shop room during lunch!

To be fair, there were many posts from teens who said their schools are nothing like the one portrayed in the movie. But far more from teens who agreed with this portrayal, a shocking realization for many adults. If this movie is even partially true, teens need a lot more support from adults for making healthy sexual choices than most are currently getting. Consider what kinds of peer or other support structures could be implemented in your school or organization, and what you could do to encourage that.

Although "She's too Young" is fictional, there is a similar true story about a syphilis outbreak among adolescents in an Atlanta suburb in 1996, featured in the PBS/Frontline documentary, "The Lost Children of Rockdale County". The documentary can be purchased for use in educational settings and there is an accompanying teacher's guide. For more information, visit: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/georgia/>

Healthy Futures offers Parent Education Programs

Healthy Futures strives to empower parents to be the primary educators of their children with regards to sexuality education.

While Healthy Futures is designed to reinforce messages that teens are already hearing at home, we recognize that for many parents sex can be a challenging topic to discuss. Parents often tell us that they feel unprepared to dialogue with their teens about sexuality. For this reason, we offer parent presentations aimed at empowering parents to speak openly with their teens about sexual health issues. Healthy Futures parent programs can include any or all of the following topics:

◆ Adolescent sexual health today

Provides information about the sexually transmitted disease (STD) epidemic and why teens are at greater risk for STDs, as well as examining potential solutions to the problem of STDs.

◆ How to talk to your teen about sex

Prepares parents to have meaningful conversations with their teen about sex and to express their values about teen sexual activity. This can be presented for parents only, or as a parent/teen interactive workshop.

◆ Healthy Futures program information

Gives parents a forum to learn what will be taught to their teen in a Healthy Futures classroom program and discuss any related questions or concerns.

Healthy Futures parent programs are offered through schools in conjunction with a classroom program or in the larger community by request. All parent programs are flexible and can be taught in the afternoon, evening, or on Saturday mornings. To schedule a Healthy Futures parent presentation, please contact 617-929-1037 or sign up on the web at: www.healthy-futures.org.

A Zogby poll of parents in the U.S. released in January 2004 shows that:

- ◆ 91% of parents want teens to be taught to abstain from sexual activity during high school years (and 79% want them to be taught abstinence until marriage or near marriage);
- ◆ 96% of parents want a sex education class to teach that abstinence from sexual activity is best for teens; and
- ◆ 90% of parents want sex education to teach that the more sexual partners a teen has, the greater the likelihood of physical and psychological harm.

See more results at www.whatparentsthink.com