

Background Information for Parents

Health and Physical Education (HPE) Curriculum, Grades 1–8 *Human Development and Sexual Health*

A Current and Relevant Curriculum for Today's Children and Youth

An updated Health and Physical Education curriculum for grades 1–12 will be implemented in Ontario classrooms beginning in September 2015. We are asking parent representatives from every elementary school and school board in Ontario to share their thoughts about the curriculum.

The insights and advice we hear through this process will be considered alongside expert advice and research, and information from the extensive consultations already completed. This feedback will assist the government as we finalize the curriculum, develop parent or educator resources and plan for the curriculum's implementation.

Why are we doing this additional review now?

An updated curriculum will be current, relevant and age-appropriate and will provide students with the skills and information they need to make informed decisions about their health and well-being.

Elements of the current curriculum being used in schools date back to 1998. Society has changed significantly since that time.

A picture taken on a smartphone today can be available for the world to see within seconds. Access to information is literally at people's fingertips, but the source and quality of that information can vary significantly. Such environmental realities did not exist to such a degree in 1998.

Youth today need knowledge and skills to respond to these realities and the benefits and pressures associated with the rapidly changing, technology-driven world, while also managing the risks and challenges of cyber-bullying, sexting, the prevalence of online pornography and other such issues.

What the research says

While teenage pregnancy in Canada continues to decline, sexually transmitted infections are climbing. More than two-thirds of chlamydia cases reported in this country occur among young people aged fifteen to twenty-four.¹

Teen sexting (defined as the electronic sending of sexually explicit images or messages from one person to another) and the impact of sexting, cyberbullying and online pornography on sexual health development are new areas of study. Research looking at the behaviour of older adolescents shows that between 15% and 28% of teenagers have sent a "sext".²

Research tells us that providing young people with sex education means that they are more likely to delay sexual intercourse.³

Recent studies have found that puberty is beginning at an earlier age than in past generations. Health experts emphasize the importance of students having information before they may require that information to make a decision that could affect their health.⁴

What could a revised curriculum look like?

Learning about human development and sexual health is one part of a balanced approach to health education.

A revised curriculum could include:

- information about sexual health presented in the same straightforward, comprehensive and balanced way as all other information about healthy living. This would include detailed optional examples, sample teacher prompts and student responses to help guide instruction and provide support to answer questions from students.
- shifts in how and when some topics are addressed to better match the changing developmental needs of students. For example, the topic of secondary sex characteristics (the changes that take place with the onset of puberty) could be addressed in earlier grades.
- a more inclusive approach, broadened to reflect the needs of all students.

How does the curriculum review process work? Who is involved?

Curriculum documents describe the knowledge and skills that students are expected to know and be able to demonstrate by the end of each grade or course. Curriculum documents don't mandate "how" an educator is supposed to teach course content to their students. Educators make those decisions based on the needs of students.

All Ontario curriculum documents, for both the English- and French-language school systems, are reviewed through a cyclical and comprehensive process. Each year, a number of subject areas enter the review process, to ensure that the curriculum remains current, relevant and developmentally appropriate, and that it aligns with broad education policies and priorities such as:

- equity and inclusive education
- environmental education
- First Nation, Métis and Inuit education

- financial literacy
- healthy schools
- safe and accepting schools.

Before finalization and implementation, the curriculum undergoes an extensive editing process and is fact-checked by third-party academic experts.

Where can I access further information?

Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education.
Public Health Agency of Canada. (2008)

www.publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2009/aspc-phac/HP40-25-2008E.pdf

Sexual Health Education in the Schools: Questions and Answers. 3rd Edition.

Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN). (2010).

www.sieccan.org/pdf/she_q&a_3rd.pdf

Lessons in Learning: Learning about Sex and Sexual Health.

Canadian Council on Learning. (2009).

www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/LessonsInLearning/07_22_09-E.pdf

Gender Identity and Gender Expression.

Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2014).

www.ohrc.on.ca/en/code_grounds/gender_identity

Notes:

1. Canadian Federation for Sexual Health, *Sexual Health in Canada: Baseline 2007* (Ottawa: CFSH, 2007).
2. J. Temple and H. Choi, "Longitudinal Association Between Teen Sexting and Sexual Behaviour", *Pediatrics: Official Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics* 134, no. 5 (2014).
3. M. Baldo, P. Aggleton and G. Slutkin, "Does Sex Education Lead to Earlier or Increased Sexual Activity in Youth?," Presented at the Ninth International Conference on AIDS, Berlin, 6 – 10 June 1993 (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1993).
4. Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN), *Sexual Health Education in the Schools: Questions and Answers*, 3rd ed. (2010).