

ABOUT ASHA

As the oldest nonprofit organization in the underserved area of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), ASHA plays a leading role in sexual health advocacy efforts through its office of health policy in Washington, DC. More recently ASHA broadened its focus towards all aspects of sexual health: healthy relationships, pleasure, and sexual rights are all part of developing a sexually healthy nation. We work with members of Congress and other important partners in health policy to educate policy makers about the urgency of sexual health, the need for additional research, and the importance of frontline support for sexual health programs in our communities.

WHAT IS SEXUAL HEALTH?

Defining sexual health is a difficult task, as each culture, sub-culture, and individual has different standards of sexual health. ASHA believes that sexual health includes far more than avoiding disease or unplanned pregnancy. We also believe that having a sexually transmitted infection or unintended pregnancy does not prevent someone from being or becoming sexually healthy.

Sexual health is the ability to embrace and enjoy our sexuality throughout our lives. It is an important part of our physical and emotional health. Being sexually healthy means:

- Understanding that sexuality is a natural part of life and involves more than sexual behavior.
- Recognizing and respecting the sexual rights we all share.
- Having access to sexual health information, education, and care.
- Making an effort to prevent unintended pregnancies and STIs and seek care and treatment when needed.
- Being able to experience sexual pleasure, satisfaction, and intimacy when desired.
- Being able to communicate about sexual health with others including sexual partners and healthcare providers.

THE ISSUES

YOUTH

- Approximately half of all sexually transmitted infections are in young people ages 16-24
- More than 360,000 births in the U.S. each year are to mothers aged 15-19 years
- By twelfth grade, 65% of high school students will have engaged in sexual intercourse, and one in five sexually active teens will have had four or more sexual partners.
- 70% of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth in public schools report feeling unsafe in their school due to their sexual orientation, with a majority reporting being verbally harassed and many also subjected to violence.

STIs

- The U.S. has the highest rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) of any industrialized nation, with approximately 20 million new cases each year. HIV rates in the U.S. are triple those of the Netherlands, for example. STIs take their heaviest toll on women, adolescents, and people of color.
- The direct medical costs of treating STIs are over \$8.4 billion a year. The indirect costs are much higher, including lost wages and productivity, as well as quality-of-life costs such as physical pain, anxiety, shame, anger, and depression.
- Communities of color suffer an undue, disproportionate burden of STIs. About half of HIV cases are among African-Americans, for example. These disparities are fueled by factors that include poverty and lack of access to healthcare.

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

- Love should never hurt but sometimes it does. According to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, more than 1 in 3 women and more than 1 in 4 men in the United States have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.
- In a healthy relationship, both partners are treated with kindness and respect, and respect one another's emotional, physical, and sexual limits.

ASHA OFFERS

Advocacy/media work to insure proper messaging on issues

- Washington, DC-based policy office
- Support networks for STIs, sexual health, and cervical cancer
- Focus on at-risk populations (women, youth, communities of color, LGBTQ)

Resources for healthcare providers

Toolkits, patient counseling videos, and continuing medical education

Tools for parents and teens

- How to start the conversation and talk with teens about sexual health, being an Askable Parent
- Iwannaknow.org: ASHA's site for teens covers sexual health, STIs, relationships, pregnancy & parenthood, LGBTQ issues, and more.

QuieroSaber.org

ASHA's Spanish-language website

MEDIA RELATIONS

ASHA's Board of Directors consists of imminent clinicians and researchers in the field of sexual health.

Media outlets from around the nation come to ASHA for expert interviews and analysis across all sexual health issues. ASHA staff regularly works with journalists, writers, and producers to provide background and insight regarding scientific research, clinical practice, and policy issues. Through our Board of Directors and contacts, ASHA maintains access to leaders in sexual health medicine and research.

Our media outreach includes working with national outlets (such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Shape*, and the *Wall Street Journal*), regional print and broadcast journalists, syndicated columnists, even bloggers and college newspapers.

RESOURCES

[ASHA: What We Do](#) | [Sexually Transmitted Infections](#) | [Race, Ethnicity, and STIs](#) | [Statistics](#)
[Sexual Health Overview](#) | [Reproductive Health](#) | [Healthcare Professionals](#)

MEDIA CONTACT

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References

Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation

- Communication: A Series of National Surveys of Teens about Sex
- Global Data on HIV, TB, Malaria and More

Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network

- 2001 National School Climate Survey

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- Sexual and Reproductive Health of Persons Aged 10-24 Years, United States 2002-2007
- Fact Sheet: New HIV Infections in the United States

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