

# MAINE FAMILY PLANNING TIP SHEET

## School-based Condom Availability Programs



By providing youth with comprehensive sexuality education and access to services, youth can lower their risk for STDs and unintended pregnancy and make healthier sexual decisions. Many schools across the state are providing sexuality education within their health curriculum. A growing number of schools are also increasing access to services by making condoms available to their students.

### Making the case for condom availability in schools.

- Rates of STDs are on the rise, and 15-24 year olds account for over half of all new STD infections.<sup>1</sup>
- In Maine, 38% of high school students reported having ever had sex during their high school years; this rate increases from 17% among 9<sup>th</sup> grade students to 58% among 12<sup>th</sup> graders.<sup>2</sup>
- In recent years, condom use among sexually active teens in Maine has increased; however, condom use decreases as teens get older and switch to other methods of birth control.
- Condoms do not require a prescription or a medical exam, and they effectively prevent both pregnancy and STDs.
- At the same time, Maine teens face obstacles to obtaining and using condoms, including access, transportation, cost, embarrassment, objection by a partner, and a general lack of knowledge about safer sex.
- With the majority of Maine youth living in rural areas, schools are an ideal site for providing a resource many students need!

### What does the research show?

- Condom availability programs are associated with increased access and use of condoms among teens.<sup>3</sup>
- Making condoms available in schools does not lead to increased sexual activity among youth, and some studies have shown a decrease in sexual activity among students who access condoms in school-based programs.<sup>4</sup>
- The most effective way to increase condom use among teens in schools is to combine comprehensive sexuality education with access to condoms.<sup>3, 4</sup>

# Interested in making condoms available to youth at your school? Consider the following....



Is there support from leadership?

Yes

If you've had positive discussions with a school administrator, that's a great first step. You may also need to bring the issue to the Board of Directors--whether to provide information or obtain approval. Discussing the topic publicly can minimize controversy down the road. Maine Family Planning can provide ideas and strategies for approaching school leadership about condom availability.

Not  
Sure

Start conversations with your administrators. Maine Family Planning can help provide data, strategies and talking points for having these conversations with your school's administrators, other key staff, parents and community members.

Not  
Yet

If you don't yet have support from your school's leadership, get it! No school official wants to find out from an outside source that condoms are being distributed to students. You may want students to have access to condoms as soon as possible, but it will be well worth your time to do the ground work to bring leadership on board. **Below are some ideas for how to do this.**

## ★Find your allies.

Identify fellow staff, parents, community members, trusted medical providers and, most importantly, students who will support you. Work with existing groups, such as student council, a health advisory committee or diversity/civil rights team.

## ★Gather data.

Identify existing data around sexual behaviors, teen pregnancy and STD rates. With your allies, develop and implement polls, surveys or focus groups with staff, students and community members.

## ★Contact us.

We have helped Maine schools identify relevant data, design surveys to collect information from key stakeholders and outline talking points for school leadership and community members.

## What policies, procedures or permissions need to be in place?



**Distribution guidelines.** Does the school already have procedures for students to access related health services? If so, you may need or want to follow a similar process for students to access condoms.

**Parental approval.** The best approach is to inform parents of any new condom distribution plan. Many schools provide a letter to parents explaining why and how the school will be making condoms available. This can be done at the beginning of the school year when all other paper work is sent home with students. This letter may also give parents an opportunity to opt out.

**How will condoms be made available to students?** Schools distribute condoms to students in a variety of ways. Think about what would work best in your setting so that students feel safe and supported. Whether condoms are made available through the Nurse or Guidance Office, in bathrooms or vending machines, don't assume that all students accessing condoms know how to use them correctly. Condom brochures, palm cards and education should be available for youth accessing condoms.

**Have a plan to pay for supplies.** Condoms can be purchased in bulk at a low cost, but they still need to be included in the budget! This may include related educational materials as well.

**Condom availability is just one way to help youth stay sexually healthy! Schools should make comprehensive sexuality education a priority—from puberty through high school. Maine Family Planning can help identify ways your school can provide education and services to your students. Contact [education@mainefamilyplanning.org](mailto:education@mainefamilyplanning.org) for more information!**

### References:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015). CDC factsheet: Reported STDs in the United States, National Data for Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, and Syphilis. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchstp/newsroom/docs/factsheets/STD-Trends-508.pdf>.
2. Maine Department of Education. 2017 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey. [https://data.mainepublichealth.gov/miyhs/2017\\_reports\\_results](https://data.mainepublichealth.gov/miyhs/2017_reports_results).
3. Wang, T., Lurie, M., Govindasamy, D. & Matthews, C. (2018). The Effects of School-based Condom Availability Programs (CAPs) on Condom Acquisition, Use, and Sexual behavior. *Aids and Behavior*, 22(1): 308-320. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5758683/>.
4. Blake, S. M., Ledsky, R., Goodenow, C., Sawyer, R., Lohrmann, D., & Windsor, R. (2003). Condom Availability Programs in Massachusetts High Schools: Relationships with Condom Use and Sexual Behavior. *American Journal of Public Health*, 93(6), 955–962. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1447877/>.