

Condom Availability Programs



Increases in reported sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV/AIDS, among adolescents has prompted many communities to take action to protect their youth. One proven method is to provide comprehensive sexuality education along with school based programs that make condoms available to sexually active youth.

Why should schools make condoms available to students?

- 15-24 year olds account for over half of all new STD infections¹
- 38% of all Maine high school students reported having ever had sex during their high school years. This rate increases from 17% among 9th graders to 58% among 12th graders³
- Condoms do not require a prescription or a medical exam, and they effectively prevent both pregnancy and STDs
- Teens in Maine face many 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 condom access & use²
- Condom availability programs in school are do not lead to increased sexual activity
- In Europe and Canada where comprehensive sexuality education and convenient, confidential access to condoms are more common, rates of teen pregnancy are much lower, even as the rates of adolescent sexual activity are no higher, than in the United States

Interested in condom availability at your school? Consider the following questions and guidelines.



Is there support from leadership?

Yes!

If you've had positive discussions on this topic with a school administrator, that's a great first step. The next step may be to bring the issue to your school's Board of Directors. Whether the Board just needs to be informed or needs to approve condom distribution, bringing the topic out in the open can minimize public controversy down the road. Maine Family Planning can provide ideas and strategies for approaching and presenting condom availability to school boards.

Not Sure

Start conversations with your administrators. Maine Family Planning can help provide data, research and talking points for having this conversation with your administrator or supervisor.

No

If you don't have support from your school leadership, you need to get it! No administrator or board member wants to find out from an upset parent or community member that condoms are being distributed to students. Even if you know in your heart that students will benefit from having access to condoms as soon as possible, it will be well worth your time to do the ground work to get leadership on board. How to do this?

Find your allies. Contact fellow staff, parents, community members, trusted medical providers, and most importantly students. What groups--student council, a health or wellness advisory board/committee or diversity or civil rights team--exist and would be interested in taking up this cause?

Gather data. Poll students, conduct focus groups or distribute surveys.

Contact the Education Department at Maine Family Planning. We have helped schools find relevant data and design surveys of youth, parents and community members, to build a case for condom availability.

What other policies, procedures or permissions need to be in place in order to allow condom availability?

Distribution guidelines. Does the school already have certain 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 can distribute condoms in a number of ways.

Location

There are a variety of different options for where to make condoms accessible to students. []

Condoms supplies in the budget

Condoms can be purchased in bulk at a low cost, but they still need to be included in the budget! This may include informational materials as well.

Including education with condom distribution

Don't assume that all students accessing condoms know how to use them effectively. Make condom use brochures or palm cards available at the site of distribution, and make sure your school has a strong comprehensive sexuality education curriculum in place to equip students with condom use skills.

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 make education and accessing services a priority for your students. Contact education@mainefamilyplanning.org for more information!

A reference page of some sort?

1. CDC Fact Sheet: Reported STDs in the United States 2015 National Data for Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, and Syphilis. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/newsroom/docs/factsheets/STD-Trends-508.pdf>.
2. Charania, M.R., Crepaz, N., Guenther-Gray, C. et al. AIDS Behav (2011) 15: 1283. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-010-9812-y>.
3. Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey. (2017).