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New standards for sex ed by grade level

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By the time children reach the end of second grade, they should be able to identify different kinds of family structures.

By the end of fifth grade, they should be able to define HIV and know age-appropriate methods of transmission and prevention.

And eighth graders should be able to explain the health benefits, risks and effectiveness of various methods of contraception.

Those are some of the new national sex-ed standards proposed this week.

Adoption of these standards would be good for Illinois children, an adolescent-health expert said.

The proposed standards “are not making it a mystery so that young people know what they need to know,” said Yamani Hernandez, executive director of the Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health.

The new standards, which are recommendations for educators, focus on seven different topics students should understand from kindergarten through high school: anatomy and physiology; puberty and adolescent development; identity; pregnancy and reproduction; sexually transmitted diseases and HIV; healthy relationships; and personal safety.

Chicago Public Schools are reviewing and analyzing the recommendations, representative Marielle Sainvilus said.

The Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health will start advocating for the use of these standards in schools this year that will include training for school personnel who teach these subjects, Hernandez said.

“If you don’t educate them, they find information in all kinds of ways that doesn’t serve in a positive way,” Hernandez said. “Sex education helps delay the onset of sexual activity.”

The recommendations were specifically developed to help deal with the inconsistencies in sexual education nationwide, and the limited amount of time spent on the topic. According to surveys conducted by the Centers for Disease Control, a median total of 17.2 hours is devoted to education on HIV, pregnancy and STD prevention.

The CDC estimates there are 19 million new sexual transmitted disease infections per year in the U.S. The U.S. teen pregnancy rate continues to be one of the highest in the developed world, according to a study done in the Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality.

The recommendations are “the minimum they need to teach to set students on a path to sexual health and responsible adulthood,” said Jerry Newberry, executive director of the National Education Association Health Information Network.

The standards are the first national standards for sexuality education in public schools. They were created through a collaboration between four health organizations: the American Association of Health Education, the American School Health Association, the National Education Association Health Information Network, and the Society of State Leaders of Health and Physical Education.

Grade Level	Some Expectations of Core Concepts
Kindergarten - 2nd grade	Know: proper names for body parts, that living things reproduce, the right to tell others not to touch you
3rd - 5th grade	Describe: male and female reproductive systems, puberty changes, sexual orientation, healthy relationships
6th - 8th grade	Explain: benefits, risks and effectiveness of contraception; impact of sexual harassment Describe: signs of pregnancy, transmission and prevention of STDs
9th - 12th grade	Distinguish between sexual orientation, sexual behavior and sexual identity Describe: STD symptoms and treatments; expressing affection in healthy relationships; sexual consent

Source: National Sexuality Education Standards from the Journal of School Health.

Proposed sex-ed standards - Some core concepts

