

MASSACHUSETTS: With Chlamydia Cases on the Rise, Massachusetts Considers Expanding Sex Ed

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Incidence of chlamydia, the most reported sexually transmitted infection (STI) in the United States, has been especially high in Boston, which reported approximately 4,800 cases for the last few years. Most cases occurred among people ages 15 to 24. To ascertain the best approach to prevention, the Boston Public Health Commission conducted focus groups with young people from the neighborhoods with the highest chlamydia incidence. Focus group results indicated lack of knowledge about chlamydia, which often has no symptoms, increased teens risk of infection, and that youth acquired misinformation from peers. Anita Berry, Boston Public Health Commissions director of infectious disease, reported that some youth believed withdrawing early during sexual intercourse prevented infection. Others believed they were safe from infection if their partner had no symptoms or claimed they had no other partners. Approximately 12 of Bostons public middle schools are currently providing comprehensive sexual health education to students as part of a pilot program to prevent STIs. Only eight of Bostons 32 public high schools used the districts sexual health curriculum last year, but other schools voluntarily incorporated sexual health information into the curriculum after learning the focus group results. School administrators will vote on a district-wide wellness policy this week, and the state of Massachusetts is considering a measure that would require all public school districts to provide comprehensive, medically accurate sexual health education to students. At present, Massachusetts does not require public schools to provide sex education; although some districts supply sexual health information, others teach abstinence-only curricula. Students in Boston have testified before school boards for the inclusion of comprehensive sexual education resources in health classes. In Ohio, where STI incidence is rising, high school students have served as peer educators regarding safer sex.

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