

# INFORMATION about SEX?—A Healthy Sexuality Resource

Children and youth hear messages about sex from many sources — movies, TV, music videos, the internet. In 2002, a survey in Nova Scotia found that many young people were engaging in sexual intercourse at a very young age and many were at risk both for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) — such as, chlamydia, herpes, and gonorrhoea — and for unintended pregnancy.<sup>1</sup>

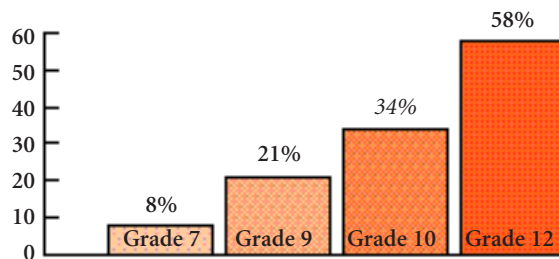
*“The health and safety of our youth is our number one priority. It’s crucial that we provide youth with credible information to help them to make safe, healthy choices about their sexual health.”*

Dr. Jeff Scott  
Chief Medical Officer of Health, Nova Scotia

Unfortunately, a 2002 survey of Canadian youth showed that these young people knew less about sexual health than those surveyed 13 years earlier.<sup>2</sup>

Health and education professionals in Nova Scotia believe that the following statistics confirm that youth need information about healthy sexual choices.

- **8% of grade 7 students in Nova Scotia have already engaged in sexual intercourse.** This increases to 21% in grade 9; 34% in grade 10; and 58% in grade 12.<sup>1</sup>



Of the students who have had sexual intercourse

- 37% had more than one sexual partner in the previous year
- 36% had **not** used a condom
- 66% had unplanned sexual intercourse
- 35% were under the influence of alcohol or drugs when they had intercourse

- **Youth between the ages of 15 and 24 have the highest rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs).** The rate of STIs is also increasing faster in this age group than in any other.<sup>3</sup>

- A 2002 Canadian survey of youth sexual behaviour also shows youth making unsafe sexual choices.<sup>2</sup> This study found that:
  - 30-52% of youth had engaged in oral sex
  - Only 1-3% of those who had intercourse had ever had an STI test
- The same study showed that 44-66% of youth didn't know that HIV/AIDS can not be cured.
- At least one in nine Canadian high school students has already been involved in an abusive relationship.<sup>4</sup>

**SEX?—A Healthy Sexuality Resource** offers youth accurate, up-to-date, practical information to help them make better decisions about their sexual health.



## How Was the Resource Developed?

Nova Scotia's new sexual health resource, **SEX?—A Healthy Sexuality Resource** is the product of a three-year-long development process, undertaken jointly by the Office of Health Promotion, Public Health Services, the Department of Health, the Department of Education, and our community partners.

Over 500 youth were involved in developing this resource. We started by asking young people what they or their friends “wanted to know, needed to know or wish they had been told” to help them to make healthy sexual decisions. Based on this information, we researched and produced a draft of a healthy sexuality book. We then tested this draft with youth throughout the province to ensure that they understood and could read the information. Seventy three percent (73%) of youth told us that this book would help them to make better decisions in the area of sexual health.

We also received positive responses, helpful advice and good ideas from eight parent/teacher focus groups through out the provinces as well as from national and provincial experts in the field of sexual health and sex education.

**SEX?—A Healthy Sexuality Resource** is a non-judgmental presentation of facts. It includes information about:

- Sex, Relationships, and Decisions
- Sexually Transmitted Infections
- Sexual Assault
- Preventing Pregnancy

Our youth have told that they want to make good decisions about their sexual health and they asked us to give them the information they need. We have listened to them and done our best to develop a resource that meets their need for accurate, up-to-date, practical, and readable information. You can see this resource at: [www.gov.ns.ca/HPP](http://www.gov.ns.ca/HPP).

*Sources:*

1. Nova Scotia Student Drug Use 2002 Survey, Technical Report. Nova Scotia Department of Health, Addiction Services and Dalhousie University, November 2002.
2. Canadian Youth, Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Study, Factors influencing knowledge, attitudes and behaviours. Health Canada, Canadian Strategy on HIV/AIDS and the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2003.
3. Condoms, Sexually transmitted infections, Safer Sex and You STD Epi Update, May 2002, Health Canada
4. Healthy Relationships Violence Prevention Curriculum, Men for Change, Halifax, NS, 1994.