

Frequently Asked Questions by Educators

Disclaimer: The following is a list of commonly asked questions our school health nurses have received from school educators. The answers provided are suggestions only and are not a substitute for professional medical advice; however, are intended to provide support for educators while teaching students healthy growth and development. Depending on the question and age of the student, educators should encourage students to consult their parents or guardians, and/or qualified healthcare professionals for personal guidance related to sexual health. Educators should approach questions about sexual health with sensitivity, respect, and an understanding of the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of their students.

PUBERTY

Q: How do I teach puberty/sexual health in a gender-inclusive way?

A: It is important to use inclusive language when teaching puberty and sexual health. Using inclusive language can support in creating a safe and respectful school environment. Some examples of how to incorporate inclusive language in the classroom include:

- Use the term “partner” instead of “boyfriend” or “girlfriend”.
- Use “they” as a gender-neutral pronoun. For example, “When a student first experiences ejaculation or a wet dream, *they* may feel strong emotions”.
- When talking about body parts, emphasize physiology instead of gender. Referring to “bodies with a penis and testicles” or “bodies with a vulva and ovaries” is more accurate and inclusive than referring to boys or girls. It may be useful to show diagrams of the external genitals if students do not know the words “vulva” or “penis”. For example, rather than saying “Girls will go through menstruation”, educators could refer to a diagram of the reproductive system and explain that “For those who have a uterus and ovaries, menstruation usually begins between the ages of 8-18”.

Q: Where do I refer parents or students if they want more information regarding puberty/sexual health?

A: You can refer parents to the [Parenting in Ottawa webpage](#) (for parents) or to [The Link](#) (for youth) for more information on puberty and healthy growth and development.

Q: Do you have any resources to teach puberty/sexuality for students with special education needs?

A: You can access [differing abilities lesson plans from Teaching Sexual Health](#) by Alberta Health Services for students with special education needs. The lesson plans often give options for students who may need more support versus activities where

students can work more independently or in small groups. Examples of topics covered include:

- Personal boundaries
- Personal safety
- Our bodies are private
- Relationships
- Sexual and reproductive health (sexually transmitted infections & birth control)
- Puberty changes

SEXUAL HEALTH

Q: Can my school order free condoms for students or for teaching purposes?

A: Schools can order free external condoms, internal condoms, and dental dams, for students or for teaching purposes from OPH using the [Sex It Smart ordering form](#). They will be delivered to your school.

Q: Where can I refer students for information regarding Sexual Health:

A: Students can be referred to the following resources for more information on Sexual Health:

- [The Link Ottawa](#) (information for youth)
- [Ottawa Public Health webpage](#)
- [Sexual Health Ontario live chat or call](#)
- Their healthcare provider

Q: Where can I refer students for information regarding STBBI testing:

A: Students can be referred to the following locations for more information on STBBI testing:

- Their healthcare provider
- Walk-in clinic
- [Sexual Health Clinic – 179 Clarence St.](#)

Q: How do I navigate discussions about abortion?

A: Keep in mind, that students may be inquiring about abortions for themselves, for someone else, or out of curiosity. This might impact how you respond to the student.

- Thank the youth for feeling comfortable to share this with you and encourage them to speak with their health care provider or one of the services outlined below.
- Encourage the student to speak with the school guidance counsellor or social worker. They may be able to help connect the student to resources and supports in the community.



- Students can obtain information on pregnancy options, including information on abortion, supports and resources for youth, at [The Link Ottawa: Pregnancy Options](#)

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