

Position Statement: Sexual and Reproductive Health Care in School-Based Health Centers

Background: Sexual and reproductive health is an important aspect of normal adolescent growth and development that encompasses biological sex, gender roles and identity, sexual orientation, sexual behavior, and reproduction.¹ Adolescent-centered sexual and reproductive health services should include medically accurate, age-appropriate information, counseling, and care that promotes healthy sexuality and reinforces effective communication and decision-making skills around pregnancy and STI/HIV prevention, including delaying sexual activity.

Statement of the Position: Adolescents remain one of the United States' most medically underserved populations, and experience poorer sexual and reproductive health outcomes compared to adolescents in other developed countries. One in four sexually active adolescent females has an STI and thirteen percent of all high school females report experiencing physical dating violence.^{2,3} Nearly one in four non-Hispanic black females, and 1 in 3 Hispanic females, will become pregnant by age 20.⁴

Adolescents face numerous barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health care. These include confidentiality concerns, and lack of financial resources and transportation, among others.⁵ Research indicates that adolescents are more willing to seek health care and disclose sensitive information when confidentiality is assured.⁶ As a youth-friendly and accessible setting, school-based health centers (SBHCs) are uniquely positioned to deliver quality and confidential sexual and reproductive health services that can equip adolescents with the necessary information, tools, and support to be healthy, safe, and ready to learn.

Recommendations: SBHCs should adhere to nationally established pediatric and adolescent health care standards in accordance with federal, state, and local laws. These standards include the provision of certain services, which include:

- Counseling and education on contraception, healthy and safe relationships, abstinence, and decision-making skills⁷
- Prevention, testing, and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV⁸
- Pregnancy testing and counseling to include the full range of options: continuation of pregnancy, adoption, and elective termination⁹

The following components are essential to delivering high quality sexual and reproductive health services to adolescents:

- Policies and protocols must be in place to ensure minor consent is provided and confidentiality is protected¹⁰
- Adolescent patients should have the ultimate decision-making authority regarding the selection of a particular contraceptive method, and the right without restriction to discontinue a method, including the removal of long-acting reversible contraception (LARC) by a provider¹¹
- Fundamental to a healthy patient-provider relationship is trusted, developmentally and culturally appropriate communication, in which the provider discloses the limits of confidentiality and encourages dialogue between parents/caregivers and adolescents^{12,13}

¹ Burke PJ, Coles MS, Di Meglio G et al. Sexual and reproductive health care: a position paper of the society for adolescent health and medicine. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 2014;54:491-496.

² Forhan SE, Gottlieb SL, Sternberg MR et al. Prevalence of sexually transmitted infections among female adolescents aged 14 to 19 in the United States. *Pediatrics*. 2009;124(6):1505-1512.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2013 Youth risk behavior survey. Available at: www.cdc.gov/yrbs. Accessed November 11, 2015.

⁴ Curtin SC, Abma JA, Ventura SJ, Henshaw SK. Pregnancy rates for U.S. women continue to drop. *NCHS Data Brief*. 2013;136:1-8.

⁵ Ford C, English A, Sigman G. Confidential health care for adolescents: position paper of the society for adolescent medicine. *JOGNN*. 2010;39:127-128.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ American Academy of Pediatrics. Teenage confidentiality: a young person's right to privacy. Available at: www.healthychildren.org. Accessed March 20, 2015.

⁸ American Medical Association, Council on Scientific Affairs. Policy compendium on confidential health services for adolescents. *JAMA*. 1993;269:1420-1424.

⁹ Ford C, English A, Sigman G. Confidential health care for adolescents: position paper of the society for adolescent medicine. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 2004;35(1).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Adolescents and long-acting reversible contraception: implants and intrauterine devices. Committee Opinion No. 539. *Obstet Gynecol*. 2012;120:983-988.

¹² Ford C, et al.

¹³ American Academy of Family Physicians. Adolescent health care, confidentiality. Available at: www.aafp.org. Accessed March 20, 2015.