

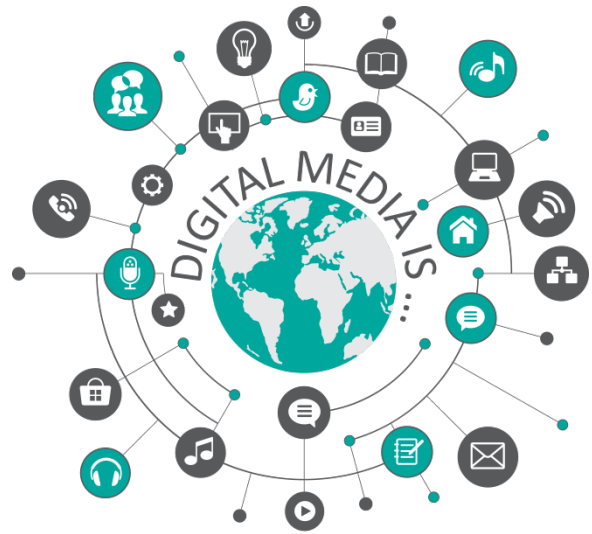


Digital Media and Adolescent Sexual Health

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preventioninstitute
our goal is **healthy** children

What is Digital Media?

- Content that is shared through the Internet or computer networks
- Allows communication across distances, across time, and to many people at once
- Involves interactivity and the ability to form groups
- Includes text messaging, social networking sites, widgets and apps, video sharing sites, podcasts, and online games



Research suggests that adolescents aged 8 to 18 years spend an average of 6 to 11 hours per day with some form of media.



- Many of these hours are spent multi-tasking (e.g., texting while surfing the internet).
- Up to 24% of adolescents are online “almost constantly” due to the accessibility of the internet on smartphones
- At least 75% of adolescents have access to a smartphone

Why Do Youth Use Digital Media?

- for exploring and maintaining social, sexual, and romantic relationships
- presumed to be safe, anonymous, and away from adult control
- available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- to get educated about their sexual health

Digital Media and Youth Sexual Health

The Internet is among the most popular source of information that youth use to learn about sexual and reproductive health, along with friends and family, schools, and health professionals.

Goal: Adolescents have the information they need to make fully informed choices related to their sexual health

Benefits of accessing sexual health information online:

- Affords privacy
- Allows for personal exploration around sensitive topics
- Convenient
- Provides fast access to information about testing and/or counselling
- Relatively safe space for sexual experimentation and expression
- Provides an innovative way to improve adolescent sexual health by improving access to sexual health information

Potential challenges:

- Information accessed may be inaccurate or misleading
- Not all websites are comprehensive or inclusive
- Remaining timely and relevant; can become outdated quickly
- Technological barriers (e.g., lack of access to Wi-Fi or technological devices)

Digital Sexual Health Resources

There are hundreds of online and mobile programs conducting awareness, outreach, advocacy, and parent-engagement activities related to youth sexual health.

Unfortunately, many adolescents are unfamiliar with specific sexual health education websites that can provide them with comprehensive, accurate information.

Some of these websites include:

Go Ask Alice: www.goaskalice.com

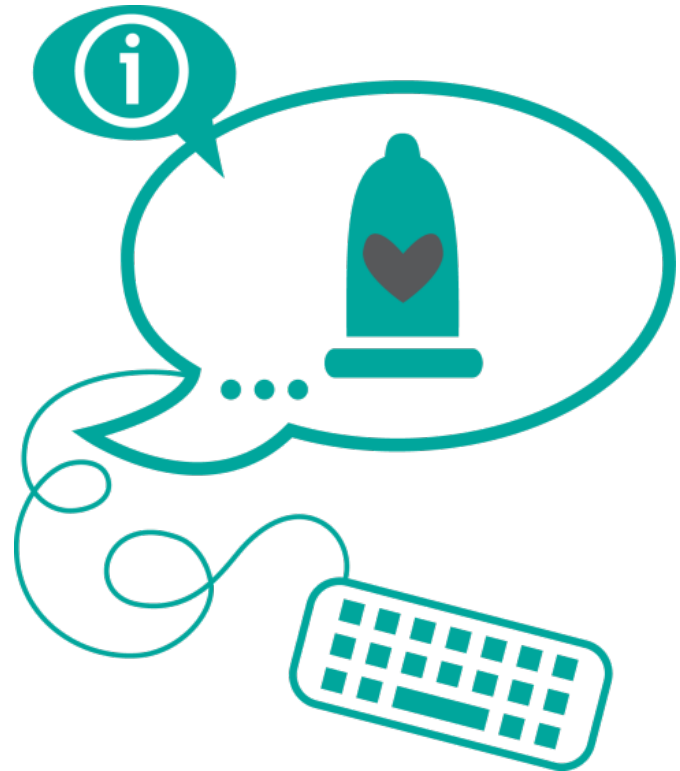
Planned Parenthood

www.plannedparenthoodregina.com

Scarleteen: www.scarleteen.com

Sex, Etc.: www.sexetc.org

SexualityandU: www.sexualityandu.ca



Information About Outcomes

To date, few digital media interventions for adolescent sexual health have been systematically evaluated. Evaluations focused on interventions involving software administration in classroom settings suggest that these types of programs may be cost effective and easily replicable means of providing basic sexual health information. Interactive computer-based interventions have been shown to have positive effects on self-efficacy, behavioural intentions, and actual sexual behaviours. A systematic review of evaluated digital media interventions found the following associations:

- delayed initiation of sex (2 studies)
- positive influence condom self-efficacy and abstinence attitudes (7 studies)
- increased knowledge of HIV, STIs, and pregnancy (6 studies)

Recommendations for Digital Media Sexual Health Interventions

Research suggests that youth are actively searching for accurate, helpful, and in-depth information about sex and sexual health that they can trust. The following are recommendations that should be considered when using digital media for this purpose.

- target messages to specific adolescent audiences
 - *ensure the tone of the messages resonates with adolescents; humour helps!*
- consider adolescents' need for privacy and discretion in online communications
 - *adolescents prefer programs that do not leave digital trails*
- consider current technology trends and how they are being used by adolescents
 - *engage adolescents in the design, implementation, and evaluation*
 - *be flexible, interactive, and fresh*
 - *DO NOT abandon existing offline or online programs in favour of the newest thing*
- use programs that push content on users' request only; avoid those that deliver content that users may not want or are not ready to look at
- make use of search engine optimization to improve search rankings and the promotion of sexual health websites
- use each form of technology for what it can do best
 - *e.g., social media for marketing, feedback, interaction*
 - *and dialogue, but not for private discussions or*
 - *private content*



For more detailed information, including a full list of references, please refer to the literature review titled “Digital Technologies and Adolescent Sexual Health”, available at <http://skprevention.ca/resource-catalogue/sexual-health/digital-media-and-adolescent-sexual-health/>.