

# Girls Action On SEXUAL HEALTH

Sexuality is a natural and normal part of young people's healthy development.

GIRLS ACTION FOUNDATION believes in empowering girls and young women with the knowledge and resources to make safe and healthy choices about their own bodies.

**INFORMED GIRLS + POSITIVE SELF-ESTEEM = HEALTHIER CHOICES**

## GET THE FACTS

### Teen pregnancy

in Canada has decreased by

**50%**

between 1990 and 2005.

For 15-17 year-old girls, pregnancy rates have gone down from

**30 TO 15.8** BUT

per 1,000 girls.<sup>1</sup>

Sexually transmitted infection (STI) rates including HIV are on the rise for female youth.<sup>2</sup>

## WHY?

STI rates are likely going up because many youth do not use protection.

### IN FACT



**1 in 5**

sexually active girls in grades 9-10 rely on the *withdrawal method* for birth control, which does not protect against pregnancy or STIs

**1 in 10**

do not use ANY form of contraception at all.<sup>3</sup>



Although 'hyper-sexualization' and girls' 'precocious' sexual behavior gets a lot of media attention, the average age of first intercourse has remained at around

**16 for both**

Canadian females and males.<sup>4</sup>

## WHAT IMPACT DOES MARGINALIZATION HAVE ON GIRLS' SEXUAL HEALTH?

Engaging in unprotected heterosexual sex is one way girls may try to fit in and why lesbian and bisexual youth have more unplanned pregnancies.<sup>5</sup>

Society doesn't tend to accept larger bodies. This can foster a low self-image for overweight girls who are more likely to have early intercourse and risky sex.<sup>7</sup>

Violence and colonialism continue to impact aboriginal girls and young women who have higher rates of STIs, including HIV.<sup>8</sup>

## The GIRLS ACTION FOUNDATION Approach

"For a long time I assumed that queer women just didn't have a place... That sex ed. was for heterosexual folks and that the information didn't apply to anyone else."



Creating and supporting girl-specific spaces. This allows more openness and trust than mixed groups - key ingredients when fostering conversations about sex.



Supporting the sexual health of girls and young women by respecting each of their unique contexts, life histories, choices, and experiences.



Applying a popular education approach in our programs: we see girls as experts on their own bodies, desires, and needs.



Adopting a sex-positive approach that recognizes the agency of each young person in making sexual health decisions.

"It's hard to talk to a guy about safe sex. It's, like, uncool... you just don't do that."

## HOW Girls Action Can Support YOU to Take Action

- Start a girls group in your community!
- Attend an Amplify Training to learn more: [girlsactionfoundation.ca/en/amplify](http://girlsactionfoundation.ca/en/amplify)
- Consult the Amplify Toolkit: [girlsactionfoundation.ca/en/resource-center](http://girlsactionfoundation.ca/en/resource-center) for information and tips on facilitating safer spaces for girls.
- Blog about issues related to sexual health or girls' and young women's issues on [Kickaction.ca](http://Kickaction.ca). Don't forget to check out the sexual health resource centre for young women: [bit.ly/\\$50M6Y](http://bit.ly/$50M6Y)

Why Girls? Find out more about issues related to Sexual Health for girls: [girlsactionfoundation.ca/en/why-girls](http://girlsactionfoundation.ca/en/why-girls)



### Additional Resources

- ✓ Online sexual education resource for teens: [www.scarleteen.com](http://www.scarleteen.com)
- ✓ The Native Youth Sexual Health Network: [www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com](http://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com)
- ✓ Planned Parenthood's site on reproductive health care and sex education: [www.plannedparenthood.org](http://www.plannedparenthood.org)
- ✓ An initiative of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada: [www.sexualityandu.ca](http://www.sexualityandu.ca)

**INFORMED GIRLS**

**+ POSITIVE SELF-ESTEEM**

**= Healthier Choices**

### References

- <sup>1</sup> Turcotte, Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report - Women and Health. (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2011).
- <sup>2</sup> Turcotte, Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report - Women and Health; Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), Report on Sexually Transmitted Diseases in Canada, 2008. (Ottawa: Ministry of Health, 2010); PHAC HIV and AIDS in Canada Surveillance Report to December 31, 2009. (Ottawa: Ministry of Health, 2010). Canadian Community Health Survey data from 2009 show that 6.5% of young women aged 15-24 had been previously diagnosed with an STI, much higher than the 3.4% rate for young men.
- <sup>3</sup> John G. Freeman et al., "Sex, Condoms and STDs Among Young People: A Mental Health Focus." (Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada, 2011).
- <sup>4</sup> Michelle Rotermann, "Sex, Condoms and STDs among young people." Statistics Canada: Health Reports, 16, 3. (May 2005).
- <sup>5</sup> Verna Mitura and Ray Bollman, Health Status and Behaviours of Canada's Youth: A Rural-urban Comparison. (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2004).
- <sup>6</sup> Goodenow et al., "Dimensions of Sexual Orientation and HIV-Related Risk Among Adolescent Females: Evidence From a Statewide Survey." American Journal of Public Health 98, 6 (2008).
- <sup>7</sup> Margaret S. Villers, "Sexual Behavior in Obese and Overweight Adolescent Females." Presented at the annual meeting of the American Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), San Francisco, CA. (May 2010).
- <sup>8</sup> Rotermann, "Sex, Condoms and STDs Among Young People."



**GIRLS ACTION FOUNDATION**

Founded in 1995, GIRLS ACTION FOUNDATION is a charitable organization that supports the empowerment, leadership and healthy development of girls and young women across Canada. In collaboration with a network of 300 community partners, Girls Action reaches 60,000 girls and young women annually. Our work is to inspire girls and young women to reach their potential and create change.