



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on January 4, 2013

Philadelphia High Schools Provide Free Condoms for Students

Students at high schools in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, returned from Christmas break to find a “gift” from the school district: dispensers at the nurse’s office filled with free condoms. [Philly.com](#) reported that the condom dispensers were placed in the 22 area high schools where students supposedly have the highest rates of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).



The free condoms are part of a “pilot program” the city is pursuing to address “an epidemic of sexually transmitted disease in adolescents in Philadelphia,” according to Donald Schwarz, the city’s deputy mayor for “health and opportunity.” He said that since April of last year, Philadelphia has distributed some four million condoms, which the city claims has led to a drop in STD rates. Schwarz said that 25 percent of new cases of HIV are teens, and that concern justifies giving out free condoms to kids. “If a teenager wants to use a condom, they should have access to a condom,” [Philly.com](#) quoted the deputy mayor as saying.

The news site noted that at least a dozen Philadelphia high schools “already dispense free condoms. And the Health Department also provides them at city high schools when they go in to test teens for STDs, as they do every year voluntarily with a parent’s consent.”

Schwarz called the pilot program a “logical” next step, and the city’s mayor, Michael Nutter, concurred. “I support the policy strongly,” he declared. “This is a serious public health matter.” Nutter justified the program by saying that the “reality is — any of our teenagers, regardless of what adults think, are engaged in sexual activities.” He added that “discussion about whether or not they should be sexually active is an appropriate discussion, but if they are, then we need to make sure they’re engaged in safe sexual practices.”

Before the start of the program, Philadelphia school district officials sent an e-mail to school nurses explaining that the condom dispensers would be located “just inside the doorway near the entrance to your office,” but the nurses would not be responsible for distribution.

One school nurse, Peggy Devine, was quoted by [Philly.com](#) as predicting that some parents would be less than thrilled about their children having free access to condoms. “I just can’t imagine the parents



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of a 14-year-old being happy with this,” said Devine.

The school district said that such parents would have to go through the process of opting their kids out of the free condoms. “Opt-out letters are to be maintained by the school office,” explained the district e-mail, and students “are to honor the wishes of their parents.” However, there are no apparent consequences for students accessing the condoms against their parents’ desires. “If a student disrespects their guardian’s directive, that is an issue of the home,” the district explained, absolving school officials from responsibility.

This isn’t Philadelphia’s first free-condom distribution program. Last year the city’s health department launched an online program, takecontrolphilly.org, that offers free condoms to children as young as 13. The website includes clickable links entitled “How to Use Condoms” and “Where to Get Condoms,” and advertises “free condoms at over 100 sites across the city ... for anyone that needs them.”

There is even a page on the website that offers to [send condoms through the mail](#). “Maybe it’s difficult for you to stop by one of our sites to pick up condoms,” the website reads. “Or maybe you’re just shy or feeling weird about picking up condoms. We understand this. That’s why Philadelphia Department of Public Health is starting a new program.... If you live in Philadelphia and you are 13 to 19 years old, all you have to do is fill out the form below and we’ll put together a package for you.”

As for school distribution of contraceptives, Philadelphia isn’t the first city to launch such a program. By one count, over 400 schools across the nation now have some form of condom giveaway, mostly through nurses or other adults. Last year the school district of Springfield, Massachusetts, approved a “Comprehensive Reproductive Health Policy” that includes the distribution of condoms to kids as young as 12.

And in September the New York City Department of Education approved a plan to make the “morning after” birth control pill available to girls as young as 14, in addition to the condoms the city’s schools distribute for free to students. The “morning after” contraceptive, which is distributed under various trade names, has been found to induce abortion in women who take it early in a pregnancy.

Chad Hills of Focus on the Family, who advocates for abstinence education over condom distribution, told the [Christian Post](#) that, contrary to claims that giving kids condoms is a positive step, such programs amount to an open invitation for sexual activity and are an irresponsible approach to a difficult problem. Many kids, he said, “must be told to brush their teeth before bed, to take a shower at least several times a week, to put on clean clothes, and comb their hair before walking out the door. Now we’re handing them condoms and instantly transporting them into the world of adult sexual activity — awakening their curiosity and sexual passions before they can even think for themselves?”

Hills and other abstinence education proponents argue that the only real solution to the problem of pregnancy and STDs among teens is to consistently teach and encourage young people to hold off on sex until marriage. The *Christian Post* cited a 2010 study by the University of Pennsylvania that found abstinence education to be the most effective means in “reducing sexual activity among youths.” The study of students enrolled in several Philadelphia middle schools found that students “who attended abstinence-only classes were less likely to become sexually active than their peers who went to classes emphasizing only condom use or even classes that taught both condom use and abstinence,” reported the *Post*.

A follow-up study found that while a third of the students who completed the abstinence-only program had sex within two years after the class, more than half of those in the program that encouraged



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condom use went on to be sexually active.

Leslee Unruh of the [National Abstinence Clearinghouse](#), an organization that advocates for abstinence-until-marriage education in schools, noted that the only effective way to protect kids from both the physical and emotional consequences of pre-marital sex is to encourage total abstinence. “Latex, powders, pills, and potions will never be the answer to this crisis,” said Unruh. “Condoms don’t protect the heart and aren’t 100 percent protection against many sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV. The only 100 percent effective way to protect one’s body and heart is by teaching sexual integrity.”

The evidence is strongly on the side of the pro-abstinence advocates. As TNA writer Kurt Williamsen noted in his article the [“The High Cost of ‘Hooking Up’,”](#) France, which relishes its notoriety as a free-sex society and has mandatory sex-ed classes and condom giveaways to students, has rampant STDs:

Sex is not only part of [France’s] national dialogue, it’s part of the country’s national pride — alongside French cuisine — and public sex is not uncommon. Yet according to the World Health Organization, [nearly 45 percent of French women tested](#) under 25 years of age had sexually transmitted human papillomavirus (HPV). When women of all ages are considered, the evidence is equally damning: 12.8 percent of French women had HPV versus 7.3 percent for women of Western Europe as a whole. The worldwide HPV rate is 11.4 percent.

He also reported that promiscuity and “unsafe sex” go hand in hand, whether or not condoms are available. The U.K.’s Mail Online reported that 70 percent of single U.K. women 18 to 40 regularly practice unsafe sex, ignoring condoms “because of alcohol, forgetfulness, trustfulness, or a dislike of condoms.”

And studies show that condom giveaways do seem to *increase* [new AIDS cases, not decrease them](#). [WorldNetDaily reported](#) that “Dr. Edward C. Green, director of the [AIDS Prevention Research Project](#) at the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies, told National Review Online”:

There is a consistent association shown by our best studies, including the U.S.-funded “Demographic Health Surveys,” between greater availability and use of condoms and higher (not lower) HIV-infection rates. This may be due in part to a phenomenon known as risk compensation, meaning that when one uses a risk-reduction “technology” such as condoms, one often loses the benefit (reduction in risk) by “compensating” or taking greater chances than one would take without the risk-reduction technology.



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