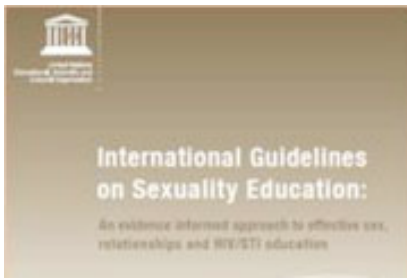


## **UNESCO issues voluntary sex education guidelines to help young people**



27 August 2009 – New voluntary sexuality education guidelines have been issued by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (**UNESCO**) to help young people learn how to protect themselves against HIV and against abuse and exploitation.

The International Guidelines on Sexuality Education also arms educators with guidance on how children and youth can acquire the knowledge to prevent unintended pregnancies and transmission of sexually-transmitted infections.

Over 5 million young people are living with HIV worldwide and nearly half of all new infections occur among young people between the ages of 15 and 24, according to the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (**UNAIDS**) and the World Health Organization (**WHO**).

At least 111 million new cases of curable sexually transmitted infections occur among people aged between 10 and 24 years every year, while more than 4 million girls aged 15 to 19 will seek abortions, most of which will be unsafe, says the non-governmental organization (NGO) International Planned Parenthood. Additionally 10 per cent of births worldwide are to teenage mothers, a demographic group that faces higher rates of maternal mortality than older women.

“At the moment, education is the best weapon we have for dealing with these issues,” said Mark Richmond, who works in UNESCO’s education division. “However, evidence tells us that by and large, young people do not have access to the knowledge that could help them make informed decisions and thereby avoid tragic consequences.”

The new guidelines, which will help fill these gaps, are not a curriculum, but instead focus on “the ‘why’ and ‘what’ issues that require attention in strategies to introduce or strengthen sexuality education,” he added.

Drawing on dozens of studies conducted around the world, they are designed to help education, health and other authorities developing and implementing school-based sexuality education programmes and materials.

The guidelines are organized around six key concepts: relationships; values, attitudes and skills; culture, society and law; human development; sexual behaviour; and sexual and reproductive health.

"Maths and science are valued as important knowledge for young people to have for their own sake," said Nanette Ecker, a co-author of the publication. "A sound sexuality education should be equally valued."

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