KIWANJA.NET
MINDFUL SOCIAL CHANGE

MOBILE DATABASE · ARTICLE

SMS SEX EDUCATION

Author / organisation	San Francisco Chronicle
Year recorded	2008
Region	Americas · United States of America (USA)
Category	Health
Original source	sfgate.com
Archive page	kiwanja.net/mobile-database/sms-sex-education/

This document is part of the kiwanja.net Mobile Database, an archive of more than 700 articles, reports and projects on mobile technology for development, collected between 2003 and 2010. It is reproduced here for reference; the original author's rights are retained.

Explore more. Browse the full archive at kiwanja.net/mobile-database.
Looking for support with your own social change work? See kiwanja.net/work-with-me.
Ken Banks offers coaching, mentoring and strategy support.

SFGate.com | Print This Article | Back to Article
SFGate.com

SexTech takes sex education online for kids

Ellen Lee, Chronicle Staff Writer
Thursday, January 24, 2008

A video podcast that talks frankly about sex. A 3-D computer game that sends teens on missions and, in the process, teaches them about safe sex and the consequences of sex. Text messages that answer frequently asked questions about condoms, pregnancy, sexuality, sexually transmitted diseases and abuse.

These are among the projects that educators and public health professionals across the country are tackling in hope of educating teenagers about sex. But rather than pass out pamphlets and hold workshops, they are trying to reach teens through the media they use to communicate, from MySpace to cell phones.

"The youth are using the next new thing. They're early adopters. ... They're looking for information on sex online and on their cell phones, so let's make it available to them in a legitimate way," said Deb Levine, executive director of Oakland's Internet Sexuality Information Services and the organizer of this week's SexTech conference, a first-of-its-kind gathering to examine how to take advantage of Web 2.0 tools, mobile technology and video games to teach teens about sex.

The push comes as the rate of teen births rose for the first time in 15 years in 2006, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Rates of sexually transmitted disease for teenagers in certain age groups, such as syphilis among boys ages 15 to 19, also have climbed in recent years.

At the same time, more than 9 in 10 people ages 12 to 17 use the Internet, and more than 60 percent of them daily, according to the Pew Internet & American Life Project. Among the younger set, 35 percent of 8- to-12-year-old tweens own a mobile phone, and 20 percent have used text messaging, said the Nielsen Co. in a report on teens, tweens and cell phone use.

Bringing the two together, the San Francisco Department of Public Health's text messaging service, which answers commonly asked questions such as what to do if a condom breaks, was inspired in part by how fans can text their vote for their favorite American Idol. The idea for a program allowing people to send an online card to tell past partners they could be at risk for a sexually transmitted disease came from online party invitations such as Evite.

In a project in June, Internet Sexuality Information Services will team up with the University of Colorado and Columbia University to test an HIV/AIDS awareness project for 14- to 18-year-olds on MySpace.

And more could be done, said Rachel Kachur of the CDC. They could create applications for the iPhone and programs on Facebook. They could send alerts through Twitter, a service that lets people send

mass text and instant messages to their friends. And mobile phones could be used to deliver results from STD tests, offer coupons, remind patients to take their medicine and help diagnose an infection.

"People have the expectation that sex is an intimate and personal issue and should be dealt with personally," said Dr. Jeffrey Klausner, director of San Francisco Department of Health's STD Prevention and Control. "But there are important issues of privacy that technology can overcome. People can access information privately and remain anonymous."

But educators and public health advocates face challenges.

They said they feel they are constantly playing catch-up to new technologies. They also complained about the challenge of acquiring - and keeping - funding for sex education projects, particularly given the controversy over how to teach children and teens about sex. And some questioned how effective these high-tech programs could be in reaching the right audience.

"There's still nothing better than high-quality, comprehensive sex education in school, but with abstinence-only programs, the ball is getting dropped and the Internet is able to pick it up," said William Neville, manager of marketing and new media for Advocates for Youth.

E-mail Ellen Lee at elee@sfchronicle.com.

http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/01/24/BUHHUJ7QB.DTL

This article appeared on page **C - 1** of the San Francisco Chronicle

San Francisco Chronicle Sections Go

© 2008 Hearst Communications Inc. | Privacy Policy | Feedback | RSS Feeds | FAQ | Site Index | Contact