



# C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health



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## Report Highlights

**Most parents say schools should, and do, teach wellness, drug/alcohol abuse, and sex education.**

**Two-thirds of parents say schools definitely should cover emotional/mental health, yet only one-third say it is currently covered.**

**Over 60% of parents want students to learn basic first aid and CPR.**

## Contact us

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases, and the University of Michigan Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Center.

## Beyond Sex Ed: Parents Want More Health Topics Covered in School

Health education is required for most middle and high school students in the United States. Typically, health classes cover general wellness topics (such as nutrition and physical activity) and risk behaviors (such as sexual activity and substance use).

In May 2016, the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents of children in middle or high school about their preferences for health education in school.

### Parent Support for Health Education Topics

Over two-thirds of parents say that traditional health topics definitely should be covered at their child's grade level: physical activity (76%), drug and alcohol abuse (75%), healthy eating (71%), and sex education/pregnancy prevention (70%). Most parents report that these topics are currently taught at their child's school.

Other health topics also get strong support from parents. Most parents say schools definitely should cover basic first aid (68%), emotional/mental health (67%), and CPR/emergency life support (63%). However, less than one-third report that these topics are currently taught.

Nearly 4 in 10 parents (39%) believe schools should educate students on how to use the health care system, but only 1 in 10 parents say the topic is covered in their child's school. Low-income parents (<\$60,000/year) and parents of high-schoolers are more likely to say that schools should teach students how to use the health care system. White parents and private-school parents are more likely to say schools should not cover this topic.

### Parents' support for health education in school

Percent who say topics should definitely be covered

Traditional Health Ed. Topics		Additional Health Ed. Topics	
Physical activity	76%	Basic first aid	68%
Drug & alcohol abuse	75%	Emotional/mental health	67%
Healthy eating	71%	CPR/emergency life support	63%
Sex education	70%	Using the health care system	39%



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2016

*This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by GfK Custom Research, LLC (GfK), for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital via a method used in many published studies. The survey was administered in May 2016 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults age 18 and older (n=2,100) selected from GfK's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. For this report, responses from parents with at least one child age 11-18 (n=757) were used. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 63% among panel members contacted to participate. The margin of error is ± 3 to 4 percentage points.*

## Implications

All but two states require schools to provide health education to students, but the content varies across states, and even from district to district. This Mott Poll demonstrates strong parent support for teaching middle and high school students about a variety of health topics. Over two-thirds of parents believe that the wellness and risk behavior topics traditionally included in health education curricula definitely should be taught in their child's school, and most parents confirm that these topics are indeed being covered.

At the same time, these poll results also indicate that many parents want schools to go beyond traditional health education topics. Two-thirds of parents say that middle and high school students definitely should receive education in emotional and mental health; this is consistent with the preponderance of mental health topics (bullying, depression, stress, suicide) found on the Mott Poll's latest [Top Ten Child Health Concerns](#). Yet only 32% report that emotional/mental health is covered at their child's grade level. Clearly, parents perceive a gap between what their children need and what they are receiving in the area of mental health education.

Another health topic with strong parent support is basic first aid, a topic that fits well with teens' transition to greater independence. However, a substantial gap exists between the two-thirds of parents who believe school definitely should cover basic first aid, and the one-quarter who say first aid is covered. Similarly, although 63% of parents definitely believe CPR/emergency life support should be taught to middle and high school students, only 19% say it is currently covered.

Teaching students how to use the health care system garners a lower level of parent support overall; many parents may not realize that privacy regulations limit parental involvement in teens' health care decisions and therefore that teens should understand fundamental aspects of how to access care. This topic is a higher priority for lower-income parents who may face challenges in accessing health care for themselves, and therefore want their children to be equipped with a better understanding of how the system works.

Schools face substantial challenges in expanding their formal health education curriculum. Core academic requirements in many states, as well as parent or student preferences for language, music and other elective courses, leave little room for expanded health education coursework. School budgets may not accommodate hiring additional health teachers. In light of these challenges, schools may use other strategies to cover health topics deemed important to parents. For example, schools may recruit health care professionals from local hospitals or clinics or other organizations (e.g., American Red Cross) to offer occasional sessions on first aid or CPR. Health professionals in the building, such as school nurses and staff from school-based health clinics, also can support expanded health education.

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