

Senate Bill 608

Youth Equity + Access

Senator Caroline Menjivar (D – San Fernando Valley)

SUMMARY

SB 608, seeks to address the sexually transmitted infection (STI) epidemic among California youth and improve public health outcomes by enforcing the California Healthy Youth Act and removing barriers to accessibility of condoms in schools and communities.

PROBLEM

According to Sex Ed for Social Change, advocates report lack of robust implementation of the existing sex education mandate continues to create barriers to sex education for young people in California. While sex education is mandated statewide, it is reported that more rural and low-income communities lack support in implementing curriculum.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that one in five people in the United States have an STI¹. In 2023, 297,940 Californians contracted syphilis, chlamydia, or gonorrhea². Statewide data show over one-half of all STIs in the state can be attributed to Californians between 15 and 24 years of age³. California youth, and in particular youth of color, are disproportionately affected by the STI crisis.

Young people report experiencing difficulties while attempting to purchase condoms at some pharmacies and retailers, including being judged, shamed, or harassed, or being asked to show an identification card despite the fact that there are no age requirements for condom purchases. Through Essential Access Health's TeenSource Condom Access Project, young people reported that cost is another obstacle to obtaining condoms. When cost barriers remain, youth with low incomes are often left without the option to regularly use condoms to help protect their health and prevent an unintended pregnancy from occurring.

Most STIs go undetected and can lead to serious, life-threatening health problems later in life, including permanent tissue damage, blindness, infertility, and cancer related to human papillomavirus (HPV) infections⁴.

BACKGROUND

The California Healthy Youth Act, which went into effect in 2016, requires California public schools to provide comprehensive, inclusive, and age-appropriate sexual health education to students in middle and high school. SB 608 will help ensure that California youth have access to medically-accurate, unbiased sex education, and equitable and readily available health resources to protect their safety and wellbeing.

Condoms are an effective tool to reduce STI transmission, but condom use among sexually active young people has declined and the ongoing access barriers contribute to this decline. The CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System shows that in 2023, an average of 21 percent of California high school pupils were sexually active and 52 percent of those pupils did not use condoms during their last sexual intercourse⁵.

SOLUTION

To support youth health and wellness, promote health equity, and curb STI transmission among California young people, SB 608:

- Prohibits pharmacies and retailers from requiring customers to present identification for condom or non-prescription contraception purchases
- Provides the California Department of Education the authority to monitor compliance of the California Healthy Youth Act
- Bars public schools serving grades 7-12 from prohibiting school-based health centers from making internal and external condoms available
- Bars public schools from prohibiting condom distribution in the context of educational and public health program initiatives (i.e. sex education, classes by community partners, peer health programs, campus health fairs, or distributed by school-based health staff)

STATUS

Introduced - February 20, 2025

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/sti/php/communication-resources/prevalence-incidence-and-cost-estimates.html#:~:text=CDC%20estimates%20indicate%20about%20a billion%20in%20healthcare%20costs%20alone>

² STI Surveillance, 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/sti-statistics/data-vis/index.html#cc-widget-44c6>

³ <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/2021-STD-Surveillance-Executive-Summary.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/sti/about/index.html#:~:text=Many%20STIs%20have%20no%20symptoms,if%20you%20are%20having%20sex>

⁵ Youth Risk Behavior Survey: Data Summary & Trends Report 2013-2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/yrbps/dstr/index.html>

SUPPORT

Black Women for Wellness Action Project (Co-Sponsor)
California School Based Alliance (Co-Sponsor)
Essential Access Health (Co-Sponsor)
Generation Up (Co-Sponsor)
Voters of Tomorrow California (Co-Sponsor)

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