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You CAN ask that

Using real-world misinformation to inform sexual health education and engagement



Purpose

Challenging misinformation remains a persistent feature of sexual health education, with the stigma surrounding sexual health further shaping the questions people ask about risk, testing, prevention and sexual health products.

This project aimed to identify common patterns of misinformation encountered during education sessions. Examining emerging themes can support engagement and ensure health promotion remains responsive to current knowledge gaps.



Approach



1. Respond

Acknowledge questions and provide evidence-based information without judgement.



2. Document

Record questions raised during sexual health education activity.



3. Learn

Identify recurring themes, misconceptions and knowledge gaps.



4. Adapt

Use emerging themes to refine education and future health promotion.



Outcomes

Recurring misconceptions were observed across multiple population groups, particularly in relation to STI transmission risk, sexual health testing relevance, prevention strategies and product toxicity. These often reflected stigma, uncertainty and the influence of online misinformation.

Thematic review informed iterative updates to education content, supporting continual improvement and ensuring health promotion remains current and responsive to identified sexual health knowledge gaps.

Disclosure of interest: None.



What are people asking?

Examples of real questions and statements heard during Meridian education sessions, and their themes.

'Can I get an STI from a toilet seat or public swimming pool?'

Transmission risk

'My girlfriend doesn't need lube, I do a good enough job'

Anatomy/Body function

'Can I prevent an STI by peeing after sex?'

Prevention strategies

'Can lube cause infertility?'

Product toxicity

'I don't need an STI test, my partner gets them for us'

Testing relevance



Significance

Misinformation-based questions are both teaching moments and a mechanism for maintaining the relevance of sexual health education. By identifying patterns and integrating real-time, stigma-aware responses into practice, this project demonstrates a practical approach to aligning health promotion with how people understand and experience sexual health.

Continued investment in responsive sexual health education is critical to addressing emerging and persistent misinformation and supporting the sexual health and wellbeing of communities.

What are people asking you?

Scan to anonymously share a sexual health question, misconception or example of misinformation you've encountered in your work.



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