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**Public Support for Condom Instruction Strong; Support for
Abstinence-Only Programs Low, New Survey Finds**

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Philadelphia -- Abstinence-only sex education programs – a favorite of the Bush administration but criticized by many health experts – are not supported by a large majority of the American public, regardless of their political or religious ideologies, a new survey has found.

Eighty percent of those surveyed favored a sex education curriculum that includes information about contraception as well as an abstinence message, according to research conducted by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania.

More than two-thirds of the 1,096 people aged 18 to 83 who were surveyed in the last half of 2005 also supported instructions on condom use.

The results of the study appear in today's issue of the *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*.

“Adults across the political spectrum seem to support a balanced approach to sex education,” said Amy Bleakley, lead author of the study. “Abstinence should be part of that sex education, but to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy it is important to provide youth with the information they need to protect themselves if they do decide to become sexually active.”

Abstinence-only education received the lowest level of public support and the highest rate of public opposition, the survey found. Teaching adolescents how to properly use a condom received more support than teaching only about abstinence.

For years, health experts have argued that sex education that precludes mention of contraception and other forms of birth control contributes to high rates of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

In fiscal year 2006, the federal government spent \$178 million to promote abstinence-only instruction in the schools. Any information about contraceptive devices, including

condoms, must emphasize their failure rates. In October, the General Accountability Office warned the Department of Health and Human Services that the information being provided as part of the curriculum was not medically accurate and thus may be in violation of federal law (<http://www.gao.gov/decisions/other/308128.pdf>).

Support for comprehensive sex education, called “abstinence-plus,” came from those who identified themselves as conservative, liberal or moderate. Among those who identified themselves as politically conservative, 70% supported comprehensive sex education.

Abstinence-plus was also supported by all religious attendance groups. Among those who attend religious services more than once a week, 60% supported abstinence-plus programs. Condom instruction also was supported by a majority across all groups with the exception of those who attend religious services more than once a week. Just over half (53%) of this group opposed condom instruction.

“Sex education in schools is clearly a politically charged issue,” Bleakley writes in the *Archives* article. “But public opinion in this instance offers an opportunity to diffuse some of the inherent tension between science and policymakers.”

“[P]olitical leaders could capitalize on this rare occasion to enact public policy that is supported by both sound scientific evidence as well as public opinion.”

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