

Health Education FAQ

1. What does the Department need to provide according to Iowa Code 256.9(46)?

- Examples of age-appropriate and research-based materials and lists of resources which schools may make available for parents/guardians and parents/guardians may use to teach their children about specific health topics
- Scientifically based research studies in the area of health and wellness literacy for schools to use in determining and implementing health education curriculum and instruction

2. What are district responsibilities according to Iowa Code 256.9(46)?

Districts may provide age-appropriate and research-based materials and lists of available community and internet-based resources to parents at registration and in the student handbook and incorporate age-appropriate and research-based material into relevant curricula. Districts shall reinforce the importance of preventative measures when reasonable with parents and students. Districts are encouraged to work with their communities to provide voluntary parent education sessions to provide parents with the skills and appropriate strategies to teach their children about specific health topics.

3. How often do districts need to provide health education information to parents/guardians?

At least annually districts need to provide parent/guardian notification about the human growth and development curriculum used and the procedure for inspecting the materials prior to their use in the classroom as well as how a parent/guardian can request a written excusal from the instruction for their student.

4. What specific topics should be covered in health education resources for parents?

The table below includes the general categories and topics to be included in the parent/guardian materials and resources according to Iowa Code 256.9(46).

Category	Topics to be covered
Consent	Recognize unwanted physical and verbal sexual advances, not make unwanted physical and verbal sexual advances, effectively reject unwanted sexual advances, and understand and demonstrate respect for personal boundaries and the rights of others
Harassment Prevention	Verbal, physical, visual, and sexual harassment
Internet Safety	Dangers of sexual exploitation by means of the internet including specific strategies to help students protect themselves and their personally identifiable information from such exploitation
Assault/Abuse Prevention and Resources	Counseling, medical, and legal resources available to survivors of sexual abuse and sexual assault, and access to support services and safety resources

5. What is the definition of research-based?

'Research-based' means information supported by the weight of research conducted in compliance with accepted scientific methods, recognized as medically accurate and objective by leading professional organizations and agencies with relevant expertise in the field, and published in peer-reviewed journals where appropriate.

6. What is the definition of age-appropriate?

For purposes of human growth and development instruction required by Iowa Code 279.50, "age-appropriate" means topics, messages, and teaching methods suitable to particular ages or age groups of children and adolescents, based on developing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral capacity typical for the age or age group. "Age-appropriate" in other academic content or school material outside of health education and human growth and development must comply with applicable statutory restrictions, including Iowa Code 256.11

7. Who can teach health education in grades kindergarten through eight?

An appropriately licensed and endorsed teacher may teach health education to their own class. If health is taught as a separate class, then it must be taught by a grade band appropriate licensed and endorsed health education teacher.

8. What content is included in health education for kindergarten?

The kindergarten program shall include experiences designed to protect and increase physical well-being with attention given to experiences relating to the development of life skills.

9. How often do schools need to teach health education in grades kindergarten through eight?

Health education and human growth and development is taught annually from grades one through eight.

10. What content is included in health education for grades one through six?

In grades one through six the health curriculum shall include all of the following: physical fitness, nutrition and the characteristics of communicable disease as well as age-appropriate and research-based human growth and development which includes self-esteem, stress management, interpersonal relationships and domestic abuse subject to Iowa Code 279.80.

In grades five and six, the age-appropriate and research-based human growth and development instruction shall also incorporate the standards established under Iowa Code 279.50.

11. What content is included in health education for grades seven and eight?

In grades seven and eight the health curriculum shall include all of the following: physical fitness, nutrition and age-appropriate and research-based information regarding the characteristics of sexually transmitted diseases as well as all of the human growth and development content established under Iowa Code 279.50.

12. Who can teach health education in high school?

Health education must be taught by an appropriately licensed and grade level endorsed health education teacher for grades nine through twelve.

13. What is required for health education for high school?

Districts are required to offer and teach at least one unit of health education (not the same semester offered twice). Health education must include instruction in all of the following: physical fitness, food and nutrition, personal health and communicable diseases including sexually transmitted diseases. Health education may include instruction in environmental health, safety and survival skills, consumer health, family life, substance use disorder and nonuse, health resources and cardiopulmonary resuscitation. Health education may include the required human growth and development content. Age-appropriate and research-based human growth and development must incorporate all of the content established under Iowa Code 279.50.

It is a local decision if and what health education is required for graduation.

14. What are the new material requirements of Iowa Code 279.50 (2026)?

The following shall be included in age-appropriate and research-based human growth and development for each grade five through eight as well as at least once in the high school health education course(s): instruction related to human development inside the womb; a high-definition ultrasound video showing the presence of the brain, heart, and other vital organs in early fetal development; a high-quality, computer-generated rendering or animation, or an ultrasound or other real image, that depicts the humanity of the unborn child by showing prenatal human development, starting at fertilization, noting significant markers in cell growth and organ development throughout every stage of pregnancy subject to the material requirements of Iowa Code 279.50.

15. Can guest speakers present on health education topics?

Guest speakers or content experts may present about specific topics. The appropriately licensed and endorsed teacher is responsible for overall curriculum, instruction and assessment.

16. What restrictions are in place for health education?

State law includes the following limitations on instruction and material:

- Iowa Code 279.80 restricts any program, curriculum, test, survey, questionnaire, promotion or instruction relating to gender theory or sexual orientation to students in grades kindergarten through six.
- Iowa Code 279.50 prohibits the instruction in human growth and development from including any book, article, outline, handout, video or other educational material produced or provided by an entity that performs or promotes abortions or contracts or subcontracts with an entity that performs or promotes abortions or becomes or continues to be an affiliate of any entity that performs or promotes abortions or regularly makes referrals to an entity that provides or promotes abortions.