

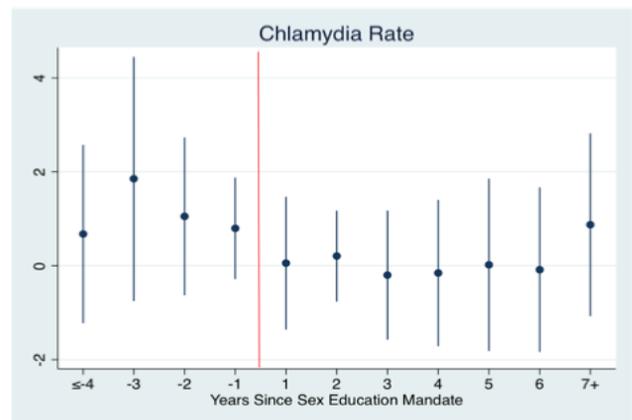
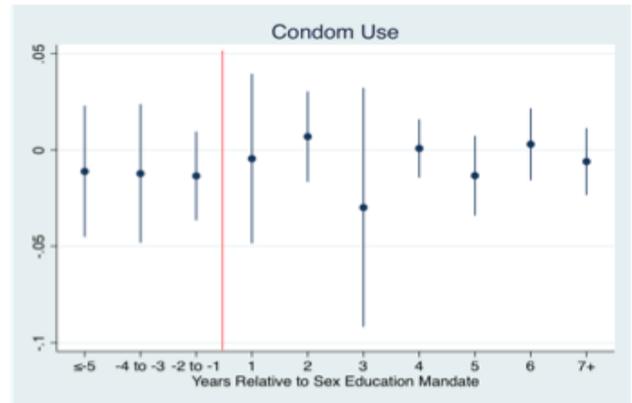
The Effect of State Mandated Sex Education on Teenage Sexual Behaviors and Health

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Sex education is an informational policy tool intended to reduce the future costs of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. As the level of concern over teenage pregnancy and STDs as economic and public health issues increased over time, states implemented and encouraged the teaching of sex education. The debate over school based sex education in the United States is centered on two major questions. Firstly, do schools have a responsibility to teach students about issues related to sex? Secondly, if schools teach sex education, what type of information should be presented? Using data from multiple sources, including the Youth Risk Behavioral Surveys, National Vital Statistics, and the CDC's Wonder statistics on STDs, this study presents the first examination of the effect of state-level sex education mandates on teenage sexual behaviors, STDs, and birth rates.

Key Findings

- No significant effect on the probability of teenagers engaging in sexual intercourse as a result of a sex education mandate is found. However, condom use among teens increases by 3%, suggesting teenagers are not having more sex, but they are having safer sex.
- No significant effect on birth rates for 15-19 year-olds is found, but there is a statistically significant 8.4% decrease in the teenage chlamydia rate.
- A causal interpretation of the effect of sex education mandates on teenage sexual behaviors and health can be supported by the following figures. There exists no evidence of pre-treatment trends in either of the outcome measures (a result necessary for the identification assumption of my empirical method).

**Policy Implications**

- Is sex education cost effective? Yes. A typical sex education curriculum costs about \$200. There are roughly 27,000 U.S. public schools. If each school implemented a sex education program, it would cost \$5.4 million nationwide.
- An 8.4% decrease in the teenage chlamydia rate alone would result in \$43 million in savings for annual STD care costs.

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