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## Education, Access to Information and Services Are Key to Protecting and Empowering Young People

Providing age-appropriate sexuality education, including abstinence, and promoting responsible and safe behaviour are essential to reducing adolescent pregnancy and stemming the AIDS pandemic, according to *The State of World Population 2003* report released today by UNFPA.

Nearly half of all new HIV infections are among young people aged 15-24, yet only 44 out of 107 countries surveyed did not include AIDS education in their school curricula, says the report, *Making 1 Billion Count: Investing in Adolescents' Health and Rights*. The unmet need for contraception among adolescents is more than twice as high as that of the general population.

Young people increasingly derive their knowledge from unreliable sources, such as their peers and entertainment media. Adolescents who are not in school are often more vulnerable to risky behaviour and reaching them is a key challenge. The involvement of communities, parents and young people themselves is essential to successful behaviour change efforts. There is no "one size fits all" solution, stresses the report.

The report offers examples of creative programmes that use drama, mass media, sports, formal and informal education to reach youth. (See news feature: What's Your Excuse?) In Uganda, education has already proven effective to delay the onset of sexual activity. In one school district, only 5 per cent of students aged 13 to 16 years reported being sexually active in 2001, down from 60 per cent in 1994. New efforts are under way to reach 10 million students with a new AIDS curriculum.

In Brazil, the percentage of adolescents reporting condom use has grown. In 1994, only 4 per cent said they used a condom in their first sexual encounter. In 1999, 48 per cent said they used condoms regularly. In Ghana, peer education programmes on HIV/AIDS have successfully reached 75,000 in- and out-of-school youth, including street youth.

Investment in "youth-friendly" services that are affordable, convenient and offer confidentiality is critical. Many countries are removing legal obstacles so that youth can access the services they need, states the report. Under South African law, for example, anyone 14 years or older has the right to receive contraception. Securing funding for

programmes and ensuring sustainability remain key challenges for many countries, according to the report.

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UNFPA's *State of World Population* report has been published annually since 1978. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of the 2003 report discuss effective ways to teach youth safer, responsible behaviour. The full report is available online at [www.unfpa.org](http://www.unfpa.org). For more information contact William A. Ryan ([ryanw@unfpa.org](mailto:ryanw@unfpa.org)).