# Risky sexual behaviour and alcohol use in young people

- **Widespread internet access and social media have changed how young people conduct their sexual lives, bringing about new risks. At the same time, existing risks (e.g. sexually transmitted infections) remain relatively high.**

- **Sex and relationship education (SRE) is regarded as vital for improving young people's sexual health but it is not statutory and provision is variable.**

- **NIHR SPHR researchers have gathered evidence relating to SRE and alcohol education and have developed best practice criteria that will enable schools to establish and maintain standards for school-based SRE.**

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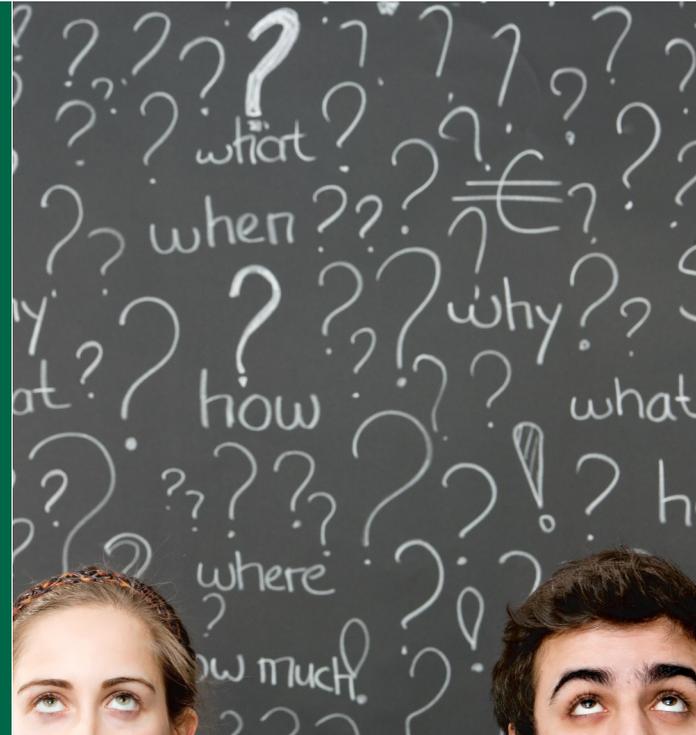
# There is a need to develop an evidence-based sexual health and alcohol education programme for use in schools in England

## Key issues

- New digital technologies have changed how young people learn about sex, bringing about new opportunities but also new risks.
- There is evidence that young people are particularly vulnerable when it comes to unwanted sexual experiences.
- SRE is regarded as vital for improving young people's sexual health but it is not statutory and provision is variable.

## What we did

NIHR SPHR researchers conducted five pieces of research to identify best practice in SRE and alcohol education:

1. A telephone interview study with practitioners in local authorities across all English regions to investigate best practice and obstacles to this.
2. A synthesis of qualitative studies of young people's views of their SRE.
3. A case study investigation of factors that make SRE programmes acceptable to young people, parents and those delivering them.
4. Two analyses of data from the third National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal-3).
5. A systematic review of systematic reviews of school-based sexual health and alcohol interventions.

Findings were also presented and discussed at a series of four stakeholder meetings that were held with policy and practice experts and young people.

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## Findings and implications

- The status of evidence relating to SRE and alcohol education was established and criteria for good practice in SRE identified.
- In some areas a divergence between the views of young people and professionals (e.g. on who should deliver SRE) was identified, reflecting conflict between the principles of sustainability and acceptability.
- These best practice criteria can be used to evaluate existing programmes and help set standards for school-based SRE.

## What next?

The criteria for best practice were used to identify an existing SRE programme that most closely fits these criteria.

A process evaluation of this programme is currently being conducted.

*NIHR SPHR researchers are planning to maximise the likelihood of the evidence-based best practice criteria being adopted in schools by ensuring they reach the appropriate professionals and by providing adequate support and guidance on how to implement them.*

## References:

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## Find out more about this study from:

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