

*Building a Healthy New Mexico!*Dona Cook
Deputy SecretaryFor immediate release:
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ALBUQUERQUE -- The New Mexico Department of Health held a press conference today to announce that contracts for abstinence-only education will be available to teach students in sixth grade and younger.

Sex education for students in seventh grade and older must be comprehensive and include discussion about contraceptives and sexually transmitted diseases. Promoting abstinence will continue to be a theme in all sex-education curricula.

National research has indicated that abstinence programs work best among adolescents who have not yet engaged in sex. Department of Health studies have reported alarming numbers of teens having sex at young ages. In a survey of middle-schools students, 30 percent of eighth graders, 20 percent of seventh graders and 15 percent of sixth graders reported having sex. Considering the statistics and research, the department will shift abstinence-only programs to younger grade levels, when they will be the most effective in promoting abstinence.

“The most effective way to protect kids is to discourage them from engaging in sexual activity,” said Michelle Lujan Grisham. “However, the reality is some adolescents do engage in sexual behavior. To be cognizant of that fact and do nothing about it is unconscionable. We want to make sure all of New Mexico’s children know how to protect themselves if they become sexually active.”

The department allocates about \$500,000 in federal Title V money to six contractors who provide abstinence programs in nine counties. Existing contracts will continue for the remainder of this school year. Current and new contractors may respond to a new request for proposals for next school year.

Speakers:

Michelle Lujan Grisham, secretary of New Mexico Department of Health
Kirbie Platro, age 15, student at Highland High School in Albuquerque and member of Young Women United
Sylvia Ruiz, executive director of New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition