



# Guidance for Health Education Content Specifications

## Introduction

Health education is essential to a student's overall educational experience and builds skills for lifelong healthy living. The goal of health education is to develop health literacy. "School-based health education helps [students] acquire functional health knowledge, and strengthens attitudes, beliefs, and practice skills needed to adopt and maintain healthy behaviors throughout their lives" ([Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \[CDC\]](#)). This document addresses the kindergarten through grade 12 health education requirements in Iowa Code sections 256.11 and 279.50 and Iowa Administrative Code Chapter 12.

## Grade Band Requirements

Schools and districts must use a multicultural, gender-fair approach for all educational content and grade bands. Global perspectives must also be incorporated into all levels of the educational program.

For kindergarten through grade eight, health education may be integrated into other relevant subjects. The time allocated to health education content specifications is locally determined. If taught as a separate subject or course, an appropriately licensed and endorsed health education teacher must teach the subject or course. For grades nine through 12, the district must offer and teach at least one unit of health education per year. The unit must be taught by an appropriately licensed and endorsed health education teacher. Whether health education is required to graduate is a local decision.

Written student-specific religious exemptions apply to health content and courses. As indicated by local board policy, exemptions are processed at the school district level.

## Health Education Content Specifications

The content specifications are required topics to address in the various grade bands during health education instruction. Each content specification should be addressed at some time during the required grade band using age and developmentally appropriate and research-based information and resources. How, when, and how much of each content specification is addressed is determined locally. Health education content specifications for each grade band, as determined by Chapter 12 education program standards, are as follows:

### KINDERGARTEN

The kindergarten program must include experiences designed to:

- Develop healthy emotional and social habits,
- Grow the student's language arts and communication skills,
- Increase the student's capacity to complete individual tasks, and
- Protect and increase physical well-being with attention given to experiences relating to the development of life skills and human growth and development.

## GRADES 1-6

Health instruction for grades one through six must include:

- Personal health;
- Food and nutrition;
- Environmental health;
- Safety and survival skills;
- Consumer health;
- Family life;
- Substance abuse and nonuse, encompassing the effects of alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and poisons on the human body;
- Human sexuality, self-esteem, stress management, and interpersonal relationships;
- Emotional and social health;
- Health resources; and
- Prevention and control of disease, and the characteristics of communicable diseases, including AIDS.

## GRADES 7-8

Health instruction for grades seven and eight must include:

- Personal health;
- Food and nutrition;
- Environmental health;
- Safety and survival skills;
- Consumer health;
- Family life;
- Substance abuse and nonuse, encompassing the effects of alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and poisons on the human body;
- Human sexuality, self-esteem, stress management, and interpersonal relationships;
- Emotional and social health;
- Health resources; and
- Prevention and control of disease and the characteristics of communicable diseases, including sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS.

## GRADES 9-12

Health instruction for grades nine through 12 must include:

- Personal health;
- Food and nutrition;
- Environmental health;
- Safety and survival skills;
- Consumer health;
- Family life;
- Human growth and development;
- Substance abuse and nonuse;
- Emotional and social health;
- Health resources;
- Prevention and control of disease, including sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS;
- Current crucial health issues; and
- Human sexuality, self-esteem, stress management, and interpersonal relationships.

## HUMAN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT INSTRUCTION

### *Kindergarten*

Each school board must provide instruction in kindergarten that gives attention to experiences relating to life skills and human growth and development as required in section 256.11.

### *Grades 1-12*

Each school board must provide age-appropriate and research-based instruction in human growth and development for grades one through 12, including instruction regarding human sexuality, self-esteem, stress management, interpersonal relationships, domestic abuse, human papillomavirus (HPV), and the availability of a vaccine to prevent HPV, and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) as required in section 256.11.

### *Annual Information to Parents and Guardians*

Each school board must annually provide information to parents and guardians of any pupil enrolled in the school district regarding the human growth and development curriculum used in the pupil's grade level and the procedure for inspecting the instructional materials before their use in the classroom.

## Content Specifications Definitions

A shared understanding of content specifications increases consistency within and across districts and supports compliance in addressing each topic. With that, this section provides working definitions for the content specifications and, as applicable, includes possible topic examples (which are not exhaustive). The definitions are listed in alphabetical order and align with the Health Behavior Outcomes (HBOs) of the [Health Education Curriculum Analysis Tool \(HECAT\)](#) from the CDC, as appropriate.

## Definitions and Examples

### CONSUMER HEALTH

The term “consumer health” refers to decisions about the use of health information, services, and products that will have a direct effect on health.

Example topic: Recognizing and seeking appropriate healthcare professionals and resources for various health and wellness needs.

### CURRENT CRUCIAL HEALTH ISSUES

The term “current crucial health issues” refers to the timely and emerging topics that are important to students, families, and/or communities.

*Note:* Such issues may be determined from recent local, state, or national health data.

### EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL HEALTH

The term “emotional and social health” includes social-emotional-behavioral health (SEBH) and mental well-being, which affect how we think, feel, communicate, act, and learn. Foundational knowledge and skills that promote SEBH include self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills that support positive well-being and academic success.

*Note:* Iowa Department of Education [Mental Health](#) and [Social-Emotional Learning Competencies](#).

### ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

The term “environmental health” focuses on the relationships between people and their environment, promotes human health and well-being, and fosters healthy and safe communities.

Example topics: Healthy and safe schools, communities, and policies.

## FAMILY LIFE

The term “family life” includes the knowledge and skills that enhance social well-being and strengthen interpersonal relationships.

Example topics: Family lifestyles and dynamics and violence prevention.

## FOOD AND NUTRITION

The term “food and nutrition” includes the knowledge and skills to understand, choose, prepare, and consume foods and beverages that support all dimensions of wellness for self and others.

Example topics: Food preparation and safety, nutrition needs and preferences, and the food cycle.

## HEALTH RESOURCES

The term “health resources” refers to any information, materials, personnel, facilities, or anything else that can be used to understand or promote health behaviors and outcomes for self and others.

## HUMAN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

The term “human growth and development” examines human development across the lifespan with emphasis on common physical, cognitive, emotional, and social developmental milestones.

## HUMAN SEXUALITY

The term “human sexuality” encompasses knowledge and skills relevant to physical, social, and emotional health, self-esteem, stress management, and navigating interpersonal relationships.

Example topics: Consent/non-consent, avoidance of health risks, and violence prevention.

## PERSONAL HEALTH

The term “personal health” refers to the ability to increase health outcomes through practiced behaviors that promote all dimensions of wellness, including physical, social, emotional, mental, intellectual, and financial.

## PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF DISEASE

The term “prevention and control of disease” involves the characteristics and prevention strategies of communicable diseases such as personal hygiene, environmental controls, and health screenings.

Example topics: Age and developmentally appropriate instruction relating to sexually transmitted diseases (STD), including human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), AIDS, HPV, and the availability of HPV vaccines.

## SAFETY AND SURVIVAL SKILLS

The term “safety and survival skills” refers to the ability to decrease health risks and improve health outcomes through the knowledge and skills to avoid danger and appropriate use of safety procedures and equipment.

## SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND NONUSE

The term “substance abuse and nonuse” encompasses the effects of alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and poisons on the human body and the knowledge and skills to avoid negative health behaviors and outcomes for self and others.

Example topics: Risk avoidance and refusal skills.

## Closing

Health curriculum for a district or school should address the required content specifications and recommended [Health Education Standards](#) by combining specific topics with skills-based standards (see the [Guidance for Health Education Standards](#) for more information on reading and using the standards).

Decisions about how to help students meet learning goals are at the local control of districts, schools, and teachers.

While the required content specifications and recommended standards should inform local curriculum selection, they do not form a curriculum. For assistance in analyzing, choosing, and/or developing a curriculum, see the [HECAT self-assessment and planning guide](#).

## **Additional Guidance and Questions**

For additional guidance or questions, contact your [health education](#) or [school improvement](#) consultant.