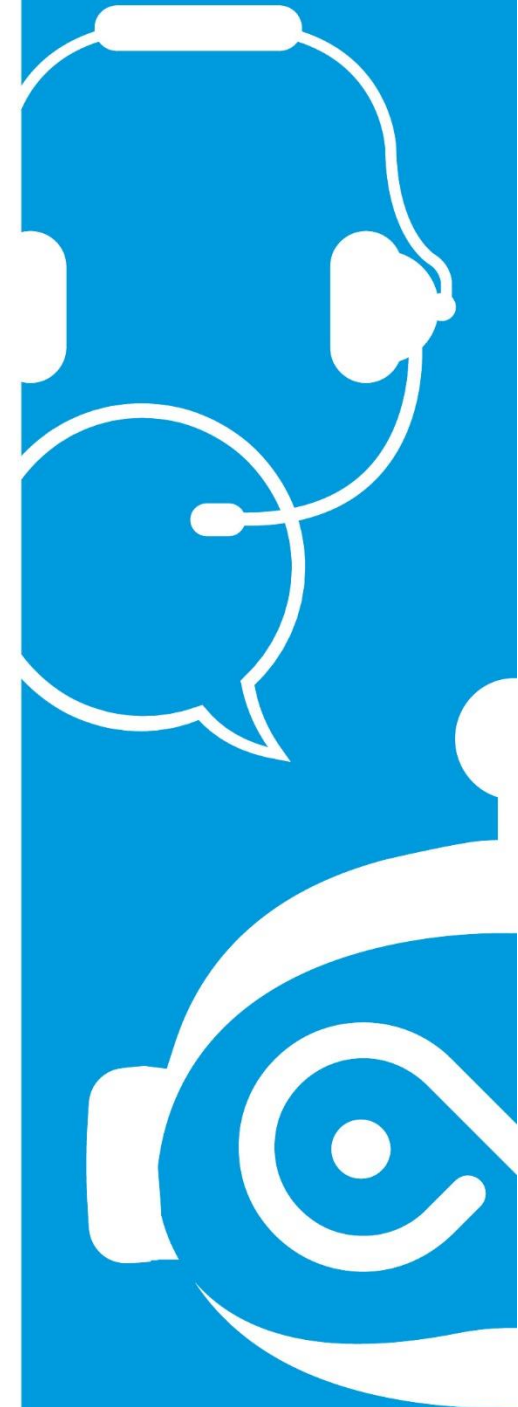




MISCONCEPTIONS AND MISINFORMATION: STDS AND CONTRACEPTION

What is it?

The topic of sexually transmitted diseases and methods of contraception or safe sex are topics that young people are interested in and therefore look for online. In the abundance of information on the Internet, it is difficult to find credible sources, which can lead to the **digital phenomena** of coming across or producing misconceptions and misinformation about the topic.



How can it impact the sexual and reproductive health of youth?

Digital technologies have become a necessary part of the way that people access SRH information and care. Indeed, they increasingly play a crucial role in the dissemination of health knowledge and enable at-risk populations to bypass human intermediaries that may restrict access to pertinent SRH information.

Young people can come across various unverified and untrue information online, which can be harmful to their health and social life. Most frequent are misconceptions about vaccination, such as that the HPV vaccination is not safe or effective, and that it can lead to death or infertility. Moreover, people who are infected with any sexually transmitted disease are often stereotyped: one of the misconceptions is, for example, that the HIV or AIDS virus is transmitted by touch, so people are afraid of being close to an infected person, worsening interpersonal relations.

In addition, misconceptions can often lead to wrong decisions - there is a well-known, untrue myth about the HIV virus can only be contracted through intercourse with a same-sex partner, which may result in a person not engaging in safe sex with a heterosexual partner and then becoming infected with the HIV virus or another sexually transmitted disease.

Online platforms delimit the type of SRH information to which users have access by censoring content that they deem 'sexually explicit' or otherwise inappropriate. Functioning as moral gatekeepers, imposing their own norms regarding sexual behaviour and health on users, can be in some cases inappropriate or biased.



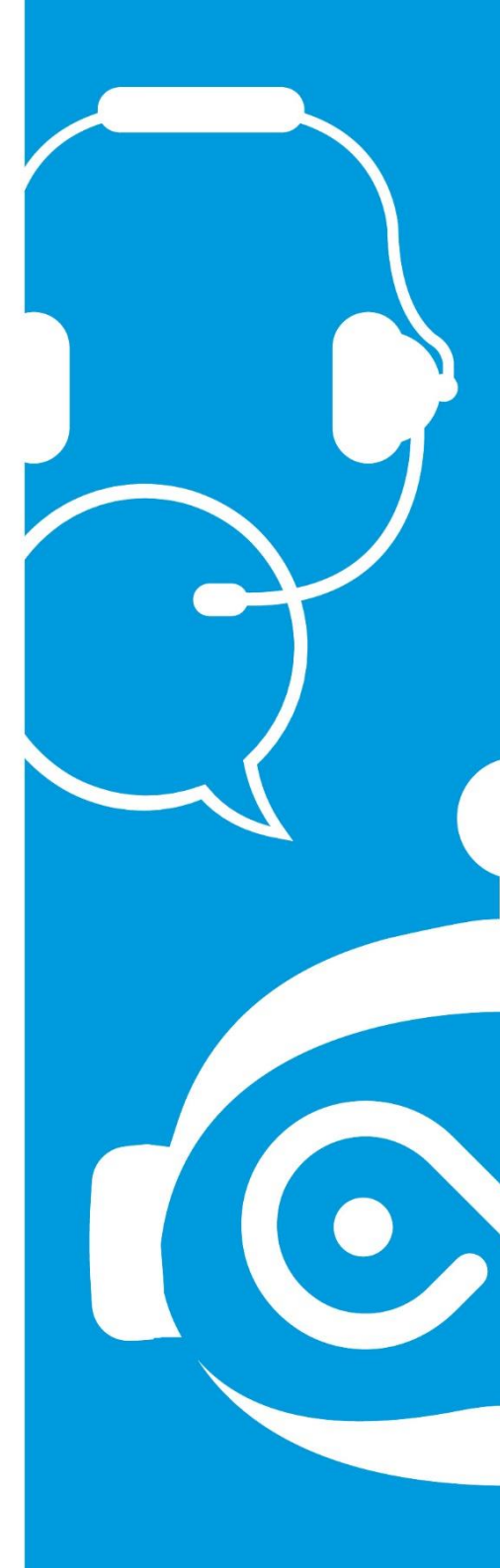
What are some ways in which youth can be supported?

- Warn young people that online platforms can be a resource of some serious rights-based and ethical concerns that implicate broader human rights. Their STD status should not be shared freely without being certain of the morality and credibility of the source.
- Familiarise youth with safe use and data protection rights. Young people should know that their data on what they follow on the Internet can be and forwarded to technology providers, so they should exercise caution when using social networks, digital platforms or applications.
- Promote the critical evaluation of information obtained on the Internet. This includes finding up-to-date information related to contraception and sexually transmitted diseases as some 'facts' on the Internet may be out of date or debunked since their publication, even if they come from credible organisations.
- Provide accurate sources. To find accurate data about contraception (access to supplies, counselling and availability of online information in your country), look for the Europe contraception policy atlas for the current year: <https://www.epfweb.org/node/89>.

Related digital phenomena/tools:

See sheets:

- Misconceptions & misinformation: LGBTQI+ issues
- Misconceptions & misinformation: Reproductive health and anatomy
- Misconceptions & misinformation: Gender expression



Further reading:

- “European Contraception Policy Atlas.” EPF. Accessed August 9, 2023.
<https://www.epfweb.org/node/89>.
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<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373885>.
- Mbachu, Chinyere Ojiugo, Ifunanya Clara Agu, Chinonso Obayi, Irene Eze, Nkoli Ezumah, and Obinna Onwujekwe. “Beliefs and Misconceptions about Contraception and Condom Use among Adolescents in South-East Nigeria.” *Reproductive Health* 18, no. 1 (2021).
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-020-01062-y>.
- Paul, Franklin, Kelly Thompson, and Naval Kishor Gupta. “INFORMATION. SUPPORT. CONNECTION. How Are Young People Engaging with Digital Spaces to Learn about Bodies, Sex and Relationships?” Unesdoc.unesco.org. Accessed August 9, 2023.
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373884/PDF/373884eng.pdf.multi>.

