Find a research article using either Diffusion of Innovations or Social Marketing to address the health risk you selected from the list above.  Briefly describe the study and include study purpose, sample size & characteristics, and setting.  Explain how the intervention was guided by the theory.  Be specific and include the theory components and how they directed the study. Report outcomes if they are available.   Include a reference for the article you used.

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Nowadays, schools across the country put a strong emphasis on primary prevention to delay the onset of sexual activity across its student population. Some of these prevention activities include sexual education classes (most common), family planning counseling services, pregnancy screening and testing, and even STD diagnosis and treatment (less common, but still prevalent). While safe sex education is becoming a core component of our educational system, the practice of making condoms available to students remains extremely controversial. This study was commissioned to determine what impact the availability of condoms would have on student sexual activity.

This study took place in Massachusetts, which has adopted one of the most progressive HIV/AIDS education policies in the United States (Blake, Ledsky, Goodenow, Sawyer, Lohrmann, & Windsor, 2010). 63 high schools were randomly selected from the state’s 299 high schools with 100 or more students – 59 of these schools agreed to participate in the study. From there, 3-5 classes were randomly selected from each school, parents were notified, and students were given the option to participate. Participating students were surveyed about current and lifetime sexual activity, condom usage, understanding of STD prevention practices, etc. Responses were compared to availability of condoms to draw conclusions on the impact of these programs.

Social Marketing includes a mixture of elements that must integrate and coordinate with one another to achieve the desired outcome of influencing individual behavior. This marketing approach should include the 4P’s of Product, Price, Place, and Promotion (DiClemente, Salazar, & Crosby, 2013). In this study, the ‘product’ was condoms and researchers were trying to understand how the availability of condoms impacted students’ sexual activity. The condoms, when available in the schools (‘place’), were free (‘price’). Specifically most schools that offered condoms distributed them through school nurses (62%) or other personnel, such as gym teachers or assistant principals (38%). ‘Promotion’ was not a controlled variable in the study, as the study simply focused on whether or not condoms were available, not how schools that offered condoms promoted their usage. Perhaps a better extension of this survey would be to dig into the promotional aspects at schools that did offer condoms, to better understand the impact of communication surrounding the condom program.

The research found that students in schools with condom availability programs were not more likely to be sexually active – however, sexually active students were twice as likely to report using condoms during recent sexual activity and using condoms to prevent pregnancy. No differences were found amongst sexually active students in terms of recency of sexual intercourse or number of sexual partners. However, students in schools with condom availability programs did, on average, receive more instruction on preventing HIV infection and were taught how to use condoms in sexual intercourse.

Making condoms available in school is an indication of social support for condom usage. However, I think this research could have been improved by putting a focus on the communication aspect of the condom availability programs. Simply looking at whether or not a school offers condoms misses a big chunk of the story. It’s important to work with school leaders to set up continued communications around the benefits of these condoms, in order to ultimately influence students’ behaviors.