Wandering the Web-To Your Good Health: Health Websites for Parents, Teens and Kids

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Wandering the Web — To Your Good Health: Health Websites for Parents, Teens, and Kids

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Who Googles a diagnosis? Dr. Mom, that’s who! Parents are more likely than non-parents to look for health information online, and women with children under 18 are the most frequent online seekers of medical information. According to a 2002 survey, 72% of online mothers and 57% of online fathers had searched for health information on the Web.

Many parents look for disease or health conditions affecting their children. 31% of teens also say they look for health information online; they search for health, dieting, fitness, and “sensitive health topics.” Health information searches begin more often with a search engine (66%) than with a health-related Website (27%); many admit they don’t check the source and date of the information they find.

How can kids (and their parents) separate the good from the bad? The Medical Library Association has produced “A User’s Guide to Finding and Evaluating Health Information on the Web,” available free online at http://www.mlanet.org/resources/userguide.html. Another source of information is the HealthlineNet Foundation (http://www.hon.ch/home1.html), which curates health and medical Websites with the “HONcode” designation for reliability and trustworthiness. However, not all credible sites participate, and HONcode sites may not contain the needed information on an age-appropriate level. In general, ask: who sponsors or pays for the Website and why? Are the authors’ credentials, where did they get their education, and have they published articles in a peer-reviewed journal? Does the Website contain references to cited works? Are there hyperlinks to other exports? Do the links work? Is the content up-to-date? Are the authors experts in the field? Are the authors affiliated with a reputable organization? Is the information provided by a company that might benefit financially from the information?

Health Websites are designed to be user-friendly for both children and adults. Some sites are more appropriate for older children and teenagers, while others are designed for younger children.

Health Websites fall into two categories: (1) those targeted mainly to parents, and (2) sites meant for kids/teens. Kids’ Websites such as KidsHealth.org (http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/kids/index.htm) provide information about a wide range of health topics, including nutrition, physical activity, and mental health.

Many sites provide links to additional resources, including government and non-government organizations, hospitals, and schools. Some sites also offer discussion forums, message boards, and chat rooms where parents and children can ask questions and share information.

Health Websites can be a valuable resource for parents and children, but it is important to evaluate the information provided and to use it as one of many tools in making informed health decisions.
and health and fitness professionals, it teaches kids about stress, safety, physical fitness, a healthy immune system, and wellness using cartoons, quizzes, and games. Many activities are suitable for classroom use; teaching materials are provided.

**Tox Town** — [http://toxtown.nlm.nih.gov/] — **Tox Town**, a fun interactive Website produced by the U.S. National Library of Medicine and devoted to environmental health, is targeted to "students above elementary school level, educators, and the general public." The user clicks a link to make a human talk, hear a cow moo, make rats scurry, see tractors smoke, and view detailed environmental information from MedlinePlus and other sites. Users may select a setting (farm, town, city, harbor, U.S.-Mexican border) and learn about environmental health issues for each one. **Tox Town** is a good site for classroom use, but the linked printed material may be too hard to read for younger kids. Text-only and Spanish versions are available.

**Sites for Teens**

**TeensHealth** — [http://kidshealth.org/teen/]. **TeensHealth** is the teen portion of KidsHealth, produced by the nonprofit Nemours Center for Children’s Health Media. Written and reviewed by physicians and other health professionals, TeensHealth educates teens with about health conditions, fitness, body changes during puberty, sexual health, and other issues. Includes healthy recipes for teens, including those with diabetes and other health conditions. **TeensHealth** is also in Spanish.

**Teen Health & Wellness: Real Life, Real Answers** — [http://www.teenshealthandwellness.com/] — **Teen Health & Wellness** is a subscription Website produced by Rosen Publishing Online, a publisher of self-help materials. Library Journal chose this site as one of its “Best Reference Sources” in 2007. **“Teen Health & Wellness** is oriented toward educational use by teens in grades 6 through 12, and materials support curricular guidelines. Education is written in a conversational style in conversational style in sit-com format and reviewed by an expert medical team. Articles are short, readable, and presented in a clean, attractive layout. Topics include diseases, mental health, and related issues of common interest to teens; subjects such as Internet privacy are also included.

**Go Ask Alice!** — [http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/] — The oldest major health Website, “Go Ask Alice!” began in October 1993 (a month after the advent of the World Wide Web) as a Q&A site for Columbia University students. On this immensely popular site, the staff of counsellors, social workers, and other specialists at the Alice! Health Promotion Program at Columbia University, a.k.a. “Alice,” answer questions about sexuality, personal relationships, drugs, fitness, and general health. Targeted to older teens and young adults "Alice" is a health Q&A Internet resource that works to provide readers with reliable, accurate, accessible, and culturally competent information so that they can make informed decisions (from the site’s Facebook page). "Alice" is lively, youth-oriented, and contains sexually explicit and controversial material.

**Planned Parenthood Teen Talk** — [http://www.plannedparenthood.org/teen-talk/] — **Teen Talk** is the teen-oriented portion of Planned Parenthood, an international nonprofit organization. It provides English/Spanish information about birth control, abortion, sexual health, and women’s health. Health care providers and services are also listed. "Teen Talk" also has pages on Facebook and MySpace. "Teen Talk" also links to parents’ and educators’ pages.

**Sex, etc.** — [http://www.sexetc.org/] — Based at Rutgers University, Sex, etc. is subtitled “Sex Education by Teens, for Teens!” It is sponsored by Answer, (formerly the Network for Family Life Education), begun in 1981 by a member of the New Jersey Board of Education and now nationwide. Sex, etc. is a long-running site focusing on sexual health written by teens and reviewed by medical experts. Sex, etc. contains sexually explicit material.

**TeenHealthFX** — [http://www.teenhealthfx.com/] — Colorful, popular site begun in 1999 and co-produced by adults and teens for Atlantic Health. Includes local information for northern New Jersey (some for-profit) but also general interest. Links to other teen Websites, including health sites. Questions and answers by category (health and illness, emotional health, etc.) with searchable archives. Includes sexually explicit material.

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**Endnotes**


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**Wandering the Web**

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— "Education" explains how to find quality medical information on the Web. For older teens. MedlinePlus is a good source for school projects.

**U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** — [http://www.cdc.gov/] — The CDC Website is another massive source of health information. The “Education” section has a section for K-12 listing kid-friendly health sites. The “Adolescent Health” section lists teen health topics; “Parent Portal” is for parents of kids ages 4-11. The CDC site emphasizes public health issues such as kids’ anti-obesity campaigns, environmental health, and infectious disease prevention. CDC has links to kids’ activities and podcasts.

**American Academy of Pediatrics** — [http://www.aap.org/] — and **Companion Parents’ Website** — [http://www.healthyyouthchildren.org]. Authoritative pediatrician includes pediatrician finder. Child health public policy issues, child advocacy, public health issues, and other child health issues such as immunization, obesity, and automobile safety. Some parts of the site are members-only or require subscriptions.

**NOAH (New York Online Access to Health)** Children’s Health — [http://www.novah-health.org/en/healthy/children/]. NOAH is a high-quality English/Spanish site established in October 1994 by four New York City library organizations. The volunteer editors (librarians and health professionals) do not write the material; they find, select, and organize existing sources, which are reviewed by a content committee. NOAH began as a demonstration project funded by the U.S. Department of Commerce; it is still partially funded by the Federal Library Services and Technology Act. The site accepts no advertising (although some links have ads); information includes wellness, diseases, and other information resources. NOAH’s page layout is plain and adult-oriented, with A-Z lists of topics.

**HealthDay** — [http://www.healthday.com/] — Widely-licensed news service (used by MedlinePlus, healthfinder.gov, and other top sites) produces 18-20 health stories daily from government announcements, medical journals, industry, scientific conferences, and other sources. Also has FDA approvals and health tips. Archives are searchable by keyword, category, and topic. A children’s health news feed is available. HealthDay is also in Spanish.

**Healthfinder.gov** — [http://healthfinder.gov/] — A service of the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, healthfinder.gov is a federally-funded locator service for health information from selected government and nonprofit sources. Content is selected and reviewed by a steering committee led by the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Children’s health topics may be searched by keyword or selected from an A-Z list.

**WebMD Children’s Health** — [http://children.webmd.com/] — A popular, attractive site, WebMD is produced by a physician/journalist editorial team and reviewed by physicians. WebMD offers many entertaining features to engage users, such as quizzes, games, videos, slideshows, point-and-click menus, online discussions, and links to social media. Advertising content is clearly marked and placed separately on the page. The WebMD “Family” also includes MedicineNet, Inc. (a physician-produced consumer health site), eMedicine (a point-of-care reference for health professionals), and Medscape (a site for health professionals containing news, CME, and other resources).

**FamilyDoctor.org Parents & Kids** — [http://familydoctor.org/online/famdocen/home/children.html] — Operated by the American Academy of Family Physicians, FamilyDoctor.org is subtitled “health information for the whole family.” A “Parents and Kids” section covers children’s health. The colorful look of FamilyDoctor.org is somewhat like its sister site, KidsHealth.org, except that FamilyDoctor.org accepts advertisements; these are clearly marked and separated from other content. A Spanish version is available.

**Sites for Use by Kids**

**KidsHealth.org** — [http://www.kidshealth.org/] — **KidsHealth** is a “family” of high-quality physician-reviewed sites run by the pediatrician-led Nemours Center for Children’s Health Media. Separate “Parents,” “Kids,” and “Teens” sections address different audiences. Content is adult-written, with colorful graphics. A Spanish-language version is included. The KidsHealth sites are family-friendly choice for school and public libraries.

**Kids.gov:** Health — [http://www.kids.gov/] — Subtitled “The Official Kids’ Portal for the U.S. Government,” kids.gov has separate sections for grades K-5, grades 6-8, and educators. Links to other sites for fitness and exercise, health issues, safety, and careers are included. Songs, games, and activities for classroom use are included. Younger kids will need help in navigating kids.gov. Some materials have Spanish-language versions.

**BAM! Body and Mind** — [http://www.bam.gov/] — **BAM!**, a service of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is a site for “healthy lifestyle choices” targeted to kids 9 to 13. Created by educators...