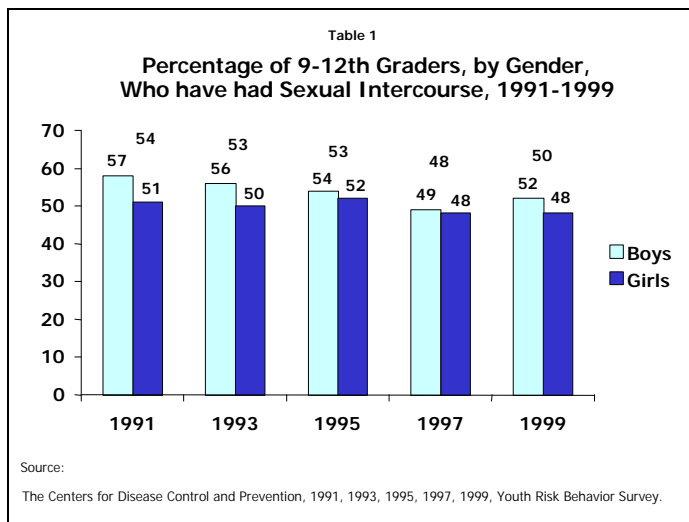


Teen Sexual Activity

The percentage of *all* high school students (9-12th grade) who report ever having had sexual intercourse has *declined* over the last decade. At the same time, among teens who are sexually active, rates of contraceptive use, including condom use, have *increased*. Both factors help to account for the *decrease* in teen pregnancy rates in recent years. Despite these trends, 863,700 teen girls became pregnant in the U.S. in 1997,¹ and approximately four million teens will get a sexually transmitted disease (STD) each year.²

General Sexual Activity

- Half of all 9-12th grade students have had sexual intercourse, reflecting a *decline* during the last decade from 54 percent in 1991 to 50 percent in 1999. Males are *slightly more likely* than females to report having had sex.^{3,4} (See Table 1.)



- The percentage of high school students who have had sexual intercourse increases by grade: In 1999, 65 percent of 12th graders had had sexual intercourse, compared with 39 percent of 9th graders.⁵
- Data about teens' sexual experiences other than intercourse is more limited. However, according to one recent survey of teens aged 15-19, 55 percent—including some who had not had sexual intercourse—reported having engaged in oral sex.⁶

First Sexual Intercourse

- The median age at first intercourse is 16.5 years. There is little difference between the age of first intercourse reported by females (16.5) and males (16.4).⁷
- The percentage of 9-12th grade students who had initiated *sexual intercourse before age 13* has fluctuated in recent years, from 9 percent in 1995 (the first year data was

- collected) to 7.2 percent in 1997 to 8.3 percent in 1999.³ Males (12%) are *more likely* than females (4%) to report having sex at early ages.⁵
- Among 15-17-year-olds who have had sexual intercourse, one in three (31%) say that "having met the right person" was the main reason they had sex the first time. Another 16 percent said it was because "the other person wanted to," and 15 percent were "just curious."⁸
- Among teen girls aged 15-19 who have had sexual intercourse, 69 percent described their first time as "voluntary and wanted;" 24 percent as "voluntary but unwanted;" and 7 percent as "non-voluntary." The younger the age at first intercourse, the greater the likelihood the experience was unwanted and/or non-voluntary.⁹

Sexual Partners and Relationships

- Most teen girls aged 15-19 who describe their first sexual experience as voluntary knew their partners fairly well—73 percent say their first sexual partner was someone they were going steady with, while 20 percent say their first encounter was with a friend or someone they dated occasionally.¹⁰
- The percentage of 9-12th grade students who report having had four or more sexual partners has *declined* in recent years from 19 percent in 1993 (the first year data was collected) to 16 percent in 1999. Males (19%) are *more likely* than females (13%) to report having had four or more sexual partners.^{4,5}
- Sixty-three percent (63%) of sexually active females aged 15-19 have partners who are within two years (older or younger) of their age.¹² The younger a girl is when she has sex for the first time, the greater the average age difference is likely to be between her and her partner.¹⁰

Abstinence

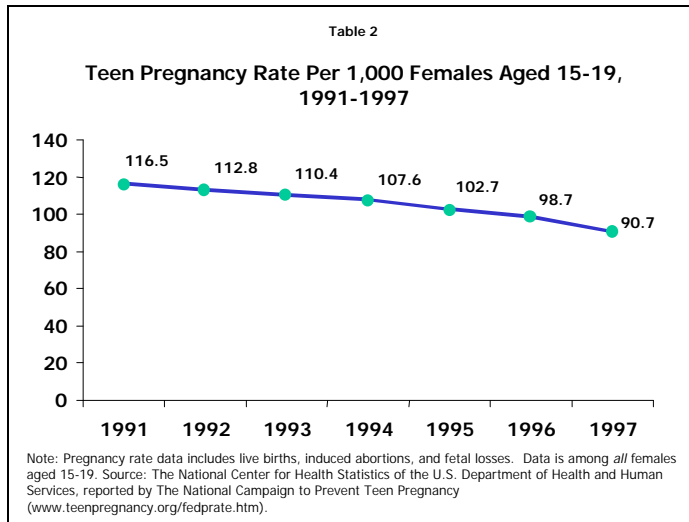
- Among 9-12th grade students who have had sexual intercourse, more than one in four (27%) say they are *currently abstinent*. Males (31%) are *more likely* than females (24%) to report being currently abstinent.⁵

Contraceptive Use

- About two out of three sexually active females aged 15-19 use contraception, but not every time they have sex.¹³
- The proportion of women who used any contraceptive method at first intercourse *increased* from 50 percent for those who first had sex before 1980 to 76 percent for those who first had sex between 1990 and 1995.¹⁴
- Condom use among 9-12th grade students *increased* over the last decade: In 1991, 46 percent reported using a condom *the last time they had sexual intercourse*, compared with 58 percent who did so in 1999. However, in recent years, the rate of increase in condom use has slowed.^{4,5}

Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD)

- In 1995, 10 percent of *all* females aged 15-19—or 19 percent of *sexually active* females aged 15-19—became pregnant.¹⁸
- The teen pregnancy rate (the number of pregnancies per 1000 females aged 15-19) has *declined* in recent years, from 116.5 per 1,000 in 1991 to 90.7 per 1,000 in 1997.¹⁵ The recent decrease can be explained by more effective use of contraception and decreased sexual activity.^{16 17} (See Table 2.)



- Since many teen girls have not had sex and therefore are not at risk for pregnancy, a more accurate measure of teen pregnancy rates may be the number of pregnancies among *sexually active* teen girls aged 15-19. This rate has also *declined* (from 211.8 per 1,000 in 1988 to 197.1 per 1,000 in 1995).¹⁶
- Approximately one in four sexually active teens gets an STD every year.²² Yet, 68 percent of sexually active 15-17-year-olds do *not* consider themselves to be at much, if any, risk. Most (57%) have never discussed STDs with a health care provider, and 70 percent have never been tested.¹⁹

Sex and Substance Abuse

- One-quarter of sexually active 9-12th grade students report using alcohol or drugs during their most recent sexual encounter. Males (31%) are *more likely* than females (19%) to report having done so.⁵

Sexual Pressure, Assault and Dating Violence

- Nearly half of 12-17-year-olds (48%) say teens today face “a lot” of pressure when it comes to sex and relationships, and another 38 percent say they face “some” pressure. Two in five teens admit to feeling *personally* pressured (11% “a lot” and 26% “some”) about sex and relationships.⁸
- More than a third (36%) of teens aged 13-18 say they have done something sexual, or felt pressure to do something sexual, that they did not feel ready to do.²⁰
- About 9 percent of 9-12th grade students report having ever been forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to. Females (13%) are *more likely* than males (5%) to have been forced to do so.⁵
- Adolescents with a history of abuse are at greater risk for becoming pregnant as a teenager than are females who are not abused.²¹

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Major National Data Sets on Teen Sexual Activity

Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), conducted every two years by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), monitors risk activities among students in grades 9-12—including sexual behaviors. Most recent data 1999.

National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), conducted roughly every five years by a division of the CDC, measures factors related to the background, family, and fertility experiences of women aged 15-44. Most recent data 1995.

National Survey of Adolescent Males (NSAM), a federally funded effort conducted by the Urban Institute, looks at factors affecting contraceptive use, sexual activity, and related risk behaviors among male teenagers. The data is taken from four household-based surveys: a three-wave, longitudinal study conducted between 1988 and 1995, and a new 1995 survey.