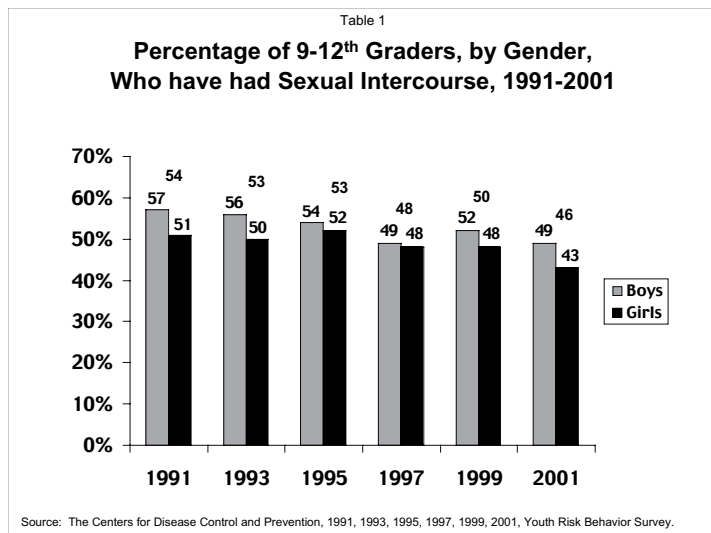


Teen Sexual Activity

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. Yet, despite these trends, approximately 895,600 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

- Fewer than half of all 9-12th grade students have had sexual intercourse, reflecting a decline during the last decade from 54 percent in 1991 to 46 percent in 2001. Males are 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 2001, 61 percent of 12th graders had had sexual intercourse, compared with 35 percent of 9th graders.⁴
- Data about teens' sexual experiences other than intercourse is more limited. However, in 1995, 53 percent of teen males aged 15-19 said they had been masturbated by a female (an increase from 1988); 49 percent had received oral sex; 39 percent had given oral sex; and 11 percent had engaged in anal sex.⁵

First Sexual Intercourse

- The median age at first intercourse is 16.5 years.⁶
- The percentage of 9-12th grade students who had initiated sexual intercourse before age 13 has fluctuated in recent years, from a high of 9 percent in 1995 (the first year data was collected) to a low of 6.6 percent in 2001. Males (9%) are more likely than females (4%) to report having sex at these early ages.^{3, 4}
- 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.⁷

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.⁸
- 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 1991 to 14 percent in 2001. Males (17%) are more likely than females (11%) to report having had four or more sexual partners.^{3, 4}
- Sixty-three percent (63%) of sexually active females aged 15-19 have partners who are within two years (older or younger) of their age; 28 percent have partners who are three to five years older.⁹ 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.⁸

Abstinence

- In 1999, more than one in four (27%) 9-12th grade students who had had sexual intercourse said they were currently abstinent. Males (31%) were more likely than females (24%) to report being currently abstinent.³
- Among teens aged 15-17 who have not had sexual intercourse, 83 percent say that "worry about getting/getting someone pregnant" was the main reason they had not had sex. Another 74 percent said they "made a conscious decision to wait," and 73 percent said they were "worried about STDs."¹⁰

Contraceptive Use

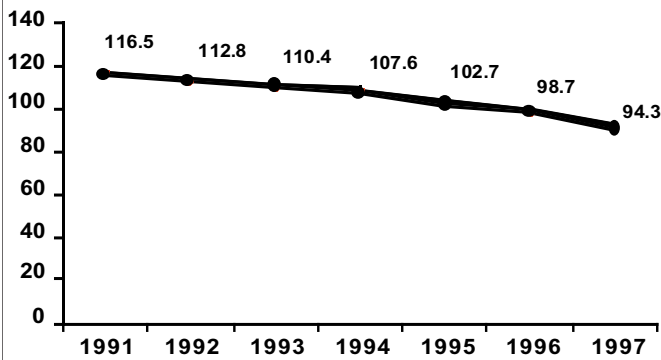
- About two out of three sexually active females aged 15-19 use contraception, but not every time they have sex.¹¹
- The proportion of women who used any contraceptive method at first intercourse increased from 50 percent for those who first had sex before 1980 to 76 percent for those who first had sex between 1990 and 1995.¹²
- 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 2001. However, in recent years, the rate of increase in condom use has leveled off.^{3, 4}
- Among sexually active 15-17-year-olds, 95 percent say that "how well it prevents pregnancy" is "very" or "somewhat" important when choosing a method of contraception; 88 percent say "what their partner wants to use," and 86 percent say "how well it protects against HIV and other STDs" is important.¹³

Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

- In 1995, 10 percent of all females aged 15-19—or 19 percent of those who have had sexual intercourse—became pregnant.¹⁴
- The teen pregnancy rate (the number of pregnancies per 1,000 females aged 15-19) has declined in recent years, from 116.5 in 1991 to 94.3 in 1997.¹⁵ The recent decrease can be explained by more effective use of contraception and decreased sexual activity.¹⁶ (See Table 2)

Table 2

Teen Pregnancy Rate Per 1,000 Females Aged 15-19, 1991-1997



Note: Pregnancy rate data includes live births, induced abortions, and fetal losses. Data is among all females aged 15-19. Source: The National Center for Health Statistics of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, reported by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (www.teenpregnancy.org/cdprate.html).

- 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 1998 to 197.1 per 1,000 in 1995).¹⁶
- The teen abortion rate (the number of abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-19) has declined in recent years, from 34 in 1994 to 25 in 2000; the biggest abortion rate decline occurred among 15-17-year-olds, from 24 in 1994 to 15 in 2000.¹⁷
- Approximately one in four sexually active teens gets an STD every year,¹⁸ and approximately half of all new HIV infections occur in people under age 25.¹⁹

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 (21%) to report having done so.⁴
- Among 15-17-year olds, 51 percent say that they are personally concerned that they might do more sexually than they planned to because they were drinking or using drugs.²⁰

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.¹⁰
- About 8 percent of 9-12th grade students report having ever been forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to. Females (10%) are more likely than males (5%) to have been forced to do so.⁴
- 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.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 2001.

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.

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