



## New Survey of American Teens on Sex:

Teens Say, When It Comes To Sex Information, They Need To Know More About How To Use Contraception and Prevent Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Most Teens Say A Parent Has Talked to Them About "Sex," But Few Have Discussed Birth Control

Alcohol, Drugs, Peer Pressure are Associated with Teen Sexual Activity, And Complicating the Choices Teens Make

Embargoed for release until: 9:00 a.m. E.T., Monday, June 24, 1996

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Teens today say they need more than the "birds and bees" when it comes to information about sex. They say they want more practical information about birth control, including how to use it and where to get it, and they say they need this information before they become sexually involved, according to a new survey of 1,510 American teens ages 12-18 conducted for the Kaiser Family Foundation by Princeton Survey Research Associates. Citing alcohol, drugs, and peer pressure, they also say teens often find themselves in situations that may compromise their ability to make responsible sexual choices, such as whether to have sex and using contraception if they do.

- Most teens -- 76% -- say the "average teen" today has enough information about how girls get pregnant. But, nearly three out of five (58%) say teens do NOT have enough information about how to use different kinds of birth control, and 45% don't think teens know enough about where to get birth control.

- Even among teens who have already had sex, many say they personally still need to know more: 36% say they need to know more about how to use birth control and 30%, about where to get it.
- Both sexually experienced teens as well as those who have not yet had sex say they need more information about preventing AIDS and other sexually-transmitted diseases -- 47% of all teens.
- When teens do get information about sex and birth control, most (57%) say the information often comes "too late," and many say it doesn't include enough detail about how to use birth control (46%) or where to get it (44%).

Teens say they get information on pregnancy and birth control from many different sources, but those on which they rely most heavily are: teachers, school nurses, and sex education classes (40% say get "a lot" of information from this source, 29% say some); and their parents (36% a lot; 36% some). Most teens (55%) say their parents are the source they consider to be the most "reliable and complete" when it comes to information about sex and birth control. Yet, while three-quarters of teens (74%) say at least one of their parents has talked to them about "sex," less than half (46%) say birth control and only 55% say sexually transmitted diseases, both topics teens say they need to know more about, have been discussed.

In addition to information about birth control, teens also need help dealing with the real-life difficult situations they say teens often face when sex is involved. More than half (55%) of teens say unintended teen pregnancies are "often" a result of teens having sex when they are drunk or on drugs, second only to teens not using birth control because they don't think they will get pregnant (62%). Among teenage girls, pressure from a boyfriend is another issue they say affects teen sexual activity, with 61% saying it's "often" a reason teenage girls have sex. A quarter (26%) of teenage girls say sometimes it's more than pressure; that teens have sex because they are being forced to against their will. In fact, a big problem with how most teens (54%) say they currently get information about sex and birth control from adults is that the information often has nothing to do with the situations teens actually deal with.

"It's clear that if teens today are going to make responsible decisions about sex, they need more than the 'birds and bees.' They need practical information about how to use contraception and negotiate sexual relations. And, they need to hear it from the people they trust most to tell them what they need to know about sex -- their parents." said Suzanne F. Delbanco, M.P.H., M.P.P., Program Officer, Kaiser Family Foundation.

### **Sex and Its Consequences: Teens Don't Always Make the Connection**

More than half (55%) of sexually experienced teens worry at least "some" that they'll get pregnant or get a girl pregnant. And, in fact, two out of three (39%) teenage girls who have had sex have taken a pregnancy test at least once because they thought they might be pregnant. Yet, when it comes to taking precautions to avoid pregnancy, many teens are inconsistent in their use of contraception when they do have sex: 24% of sexually experienced teens say they use birth control "most of the time," 15% say "only sometimes," and 11% say never. (Less than half -- 48% -- of sexually experienced teens say they "always" use contraception when they have sex.)

Teens' expectations about what would happen to them if they did get pregnant or got a girl pregnant also don't always jibe with reality, leaving many to believe they might fare better than many teens actually do when faced with an unintended pregnancy:

- Nine out of ten teens (94%), who are currently in school, think they would stay in school. According to The Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI), approximately 70% of teen mothers eventually complete high school.
- Half (51%) expect they would marry the mother/father of their child. AGI reports that eight out of ten first births to teenage girls age 15-17 between 1985-89 were out-of-wedlock.
- Only 26% think they or the mother of their child would need welfare, approximately the same percentage of teenage mothers who receive public assistance by the

time they reach their early twenties, although more than half generally need public assistance at the time of their delivery to cover medical costs (AGI).

- A quarter (24%) of teenage girls say they would consider abortion. Every year, approximately a third of all teen pregnancies end in abortion; among pregnancies to unmarried teens, half do (AGI).

A majority (56%) of teens say their friends would respect them less, if they became pregnant or got a girl pregnant.

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### Methodology

*The Kaiser Family Foundation Survey on Teens and Sex: What They Say Teens Today Need to Know, And Who They Listen To* was conducted for the Foundation by Princeton Survey Research Associates from March 28, 1996 through May 5, 1996. It is based on telephone interviews with a representative sample of 1,510 teenagers, age 12 to 18, living in continental United States telephone households. Eligible teenagers included both those living at home (either with parents or on their own) and those currently living away at school in a dormitory. At each sampled household with a teenager age 12 to 18, either the teenager's mother (female guardian) or father (male guardian) was asked to complete a short interview and then was asked permission for the teenager to be interviewed. The sample includes over-samples of African-American, Hispanic and low-income teenagers, but is weighted to be representative of all U.S. teens living in telephone households. For results based on total sample, one can say with 95 percent confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 3 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting telephone surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings.

The Kaiser Family Foundation, based in Menlo Park, California, is a non-profit, independent national health care philanthropy and is not associated with Kaiser Permanente or Kaiser Industries. The Foundation's work is focused on four main areas: health policy, reproductive health, HIV, and health and development in South Africa.

Copies of the actual questionnaire and national top line data for the findings reported in this release (#1159) are available by calling the Kaiser Family Foundation's publication request line at 1-800-656-4533. Additional background information about teen sexuality and pregnancy and teens' sources of information about sex and birth control are also available through this same service (#1160).