



ASPE

BRIEF

Background Statistics – Teen Sexual Activity

Current U.S. Trends in Teen Sexual Activity

- From 1991 to 2003, the percentage of 9th through 12th grade students who reported having had sexual intercourse during their lifetime declined 7.4%, from 54.1% to 46.7%.ⁱ
- Between 1991 and 2002, the percentage of high school students who reported having had sex with four or more partners fell 4.3% from 18.7% to 14.4%.ⁱⁱ

Current U.S. Trends in Teen Pregnancies and Births

- **Teen Pregnancies:** Between 1990 and 2000, the teen pregnancy rate fell steadily, dropping 27 percent to 84.5 pregnancies per 1,000 teens, the lowest rate since 1976.ⁱⁱⁱ
- **Teen Births:** Teenage birth rates continue to decline. In 2004, the rate of 41.2 births per 1,000 teen women was 1 percent lower than the rate of teen births in 2003, and 33 percent lower than the rate in 1991 (61.8 births per 1,000 teen women).^{iv}
- **Teen Abortions:** The rate of abortions per 1,000 teen women has been falling since the late 1980s. The teen abortion rate remained fairly stable during most of the 1980s, averaging about 43 abortions per 1,000 teen women. Between 1990 and 2000 the rate has fallen from 40.3 to 24 per 1,000 teen women.^v

Teen Sexual Activity and Teen Births are Still High

Despite declines in teen births, pregnancies, and abortions over the last decade, concerns about teen sexual activity persist:

- In 2003, 47 percent of all high school students and 62 percent of graduating seniors reported ever having had sexual intercourse.^{vi}

- In 2003, approximately one-third of students nationwide reported being currently sexually active (that is, having had sexual intercourse in the three months preceding the survey).
- About 20 percent of high school seniors reported having had sex with four or more partners in 2003.^{vii}
- Although the teen birth rate has been declining since 1991, more than 415,000 babies were born to teens in 2004, and more than 80 percent of these births were to unmarried teens.^{viii}

Economic and Social Consequences of Teenage Sexual Activity

The consequences of teenage sexual activity and non-marital childbearing are many and serious for teens, their families, their communities, and society.

- Over three-fifths of teen mothers live in poverty at the time of their child's birth, and over four-fifths eventually live below poverty.^{ix}
- There are substantial disparities in the educational attainment of teen mothers compared to young women who delay child-bearing.^x
- Children born to teen mothers often fare badly during infancy, early childhood, and their adolescent and adult lives. Compared with children born to mothers who delay childbearing until age 21 or older, children of teen mothers are more likely to grow up in homes that are not emotionally supportive or cognitively stimulating, to suffer from abuse and neglect, to repeat a grade in school, and to drop out of high school.^{xi}

Health and Economic Consequences of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

Another major concern about teen sexual activity is the transmission of STDs. The human and monetary costs of STDs are very high.

- In 2000, there were an estimated 18.9 million new cases of STDs among Americans. Approximately half of all new STD infections occur in teens and young adults (ages 15-24) each year.^{xii}
- STDs can cause lifelong health complications. Ten to 20 percent of women with gonorrhea and Chlamydia develop pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), which can lead to lifelong complications, such as infertility and potentially fatal ectopic pregnancies. (Many different organisms can cause PID, but most cases are associated with gonorrhea and Chlamydia.)^{xiii} Many sexually transmitted diseases can cause adverse pregnancy outcomes, including, but not limited to, miscarriages, stillbirths, intrauterine growth restriction, and perinatal (mother-to-infant) infections.^{xiv}
- Recent estimates indicate that the economic burden of the nine million new cases of STDs that occurred among 15-24 year-olds in 2000 was \$6.6 billion (in year 2000 dollars).^{xv}

Abstinence is Strongly Supported by the Public

- **Abstinence is the healthiest choice for teens.** Abstinence education is clear and unambiguous in its message about non-marital sex. It also aims to build self-esteem, help teens understand and aspire to healthy marriages and parenthood, and teach skills that will help youth make and follow through on good decisions.
- **Abstinence has strong support from teens and adults.** Nearly all teens (94%) and adults (91%) believe that teens should be given a strong message from society that they should not have sex until they are at least out of high school. This support has remained high (90% or better) in every National Campaign survey conducted since 1997. In addition, most adults (83%) and teens (85%) believe that teen pregnancy prevention programs should teach young people to be married before they have a child.^{xvi}
- **Teens express more cautious attitudes about their decision to engage in sex.** Many teens who have already had sex wish they had waited longer. Nearly two thirds of all teens who have already had sex said they wish they had waited longer before engaging in sex.^{xvii}

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ⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Trends in the Prevalence of Sexual Behaviors: 1991-2003: Trends in the Prevalence of Sexual Behaviors*. <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/pdfs/trends-sex.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Trends in the Prevalence of Sexual Behaviors: 1991-2003: Trends in the Prevalence of Sexual Behaviors*. <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/pdfs/trends-sex.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Ventura SJ, Abma JC, Mosher WD, Henshaw S. Estimated pregnancy rates for the United States, 1990–2000: An Update. National vital statistics reports; vol 52 no 23. Hyattsville, Maryland: National Center for Health Statistics. 2004. http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr52/nvsr52_23.pdf. See also Ventura et al, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Vital Statistics Reports, Vol 49, No. 10, *Births to Teenagers in the United States: 1940-2000*. September 2001. http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr49/nvsr49_10.pdf.

^{iv} Hamilton, BE, Martin JA, Ventura SJ, Sutton PD, Menacker F. (2005). *Births: Preliminary data for 2004*. National vital statistics reports; vol 54 no 8. Hyattsville, Maryland: National Center for Health Statistics. 2005. http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr54/nvsr54_08.pdf

^v Ventura SJ, Abma JC, Mosher WD, Henshaw S. Estimated pregnancy rates for the United States, 1990–2000: An Update. National vital statistics reports; vol 52 no 23. Hyattsville, Maryland: National Center for Health Statistics. 2004. Available at http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr52/nvsr52_23.pdf

^{vi} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Surveillance Summaries*, May 21, 2004. MMWR 2004:53 (No SS-2) p 17. Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/SS/SS5302.pdf>

^{vii} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Surveillance Summaries*, May 21, 2004. MMWR 2004:53 (No SS-2) p 18. Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/SS/SS5302.pdf>

^{viii} Hamilton BE, Ventura SJ, Martin JA, Sutton PD. Preliminary births for 2004. Health E-stats. Released October 28, 2005. www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/pubs/pubd/hestats/prelim_births/prelim_births04.html

^{ix} Maynard, Rebecca (ed.) *Kids Having Kids: A Robin Hood Foundation Special Report on the Costs of Adolescent Childbearing*. New York: The Robin Hood Foundation, 1996.

^x Hotz et al. "The impacts of Teenage Childbearing On the Mothers And The Consequences of Those Impacts for Government." In *Kids Having Kids: Economic Costs and Social Consequences of Teen Pregnancy*, edited by Rebecca Maynard. Washington, DC. The Urban Institute Press, 1997. pp. 59.

^{xi} Maynard, Rebecca (ed.) *Kids Having Kids: A Robin Hood Foundation Special Report on the Costs of Adolescent Childbearing*. New York: The Robin Hood Foundation, 1996.

^{xii} Weinstock, H., Berman, S., and Cates, W. "Sexually Transmitted Diseases Among American Youth: Incidence and Prevalence Estimates, 2000." *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 2004, 36(1): 6-10.

^{xiii} Center for Disease Control, *Tracking the Hidden Epidemics: Trends in STDs in the United States 2000*, pp. 3. Available at http://www.cdc.gov/nchstp/dstd/Stats_Trends/Trends2000.pdf

^{xiv} National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, National Institutes of Health, Department of Health and Human Services, *Workshop Summary: Scientific Evidence on Condom Effectiveness for Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Prevention*, July 2001. pp. 1. Available at <http://www.niaid.nih.gov/dmid/stds/condomreport.pdf>

^{xv} Chesson et al. "The Estimated Direct Medical Cost of Sexually Transmitted Disease Among American Youth, 2000," *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, Vol 36:1, January/February 2004. Available at <http://www.agi-usa.org/pubs/journals/3601104.html>

^{xvi} Albert, B. (2004) *With One Voice: America's Adults and Teens Sound Off About Teen Pregnancy*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

^{xvii} Albert, B. (2004) *With One Voice: America's Adults and Teens Sound Off About Teen Pregnancy*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.