

Fast Facts

Teen Sexual Behavior and Contraceptive Use: Data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2007

New data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that positive changes in high school teens' sexual behavior and contraceptive use have stalled. At present, nearly half of all teens have ever had sex and more than one-third are sexually active (that is, they have had sex in the past three months). Less than two-thirds of sexually active teens report using a condom the last time they had sex.

The Data

Teen Sexual Experience

- In 2007, 48% of all high school students reported having sex sexual intercourse—46% of girls and 50% of boys.
- Between 2005 and 2007 the proportion of students who ever had sex essentially remained stable. In 2005, 47% of all high school students reported having sex compared to 48% in 2007.
- The proportion of high school students who have ever had sexual intercourse declined from 54% in 1991 to 48% in 2007.

Sexually Active Teens

- In 2007, more than one-third (35%) of all high school students reported being sexually active—that is, they had sex in the previous three months. Thirty-six percent of girls and 34% of boys reported being sexually active.
- In 2007, 46% of non-Hispanic black students, 37% of Hispanic students, and 33% of non-Hispanic white students reported being sexually active.
- More than half (53%) of all 12th grade students reported being sexually active compared to 20% of 9th grade students.
- Between 2005 and 2007 the proportion of students who were sexually active remained essentially unchanged (34% in 2005 vs. 35% in 2007). Between 1991 and 2007 there was a slight decrease in the proportion of sexually active high school students from 38% in 1991 to 35% in 2007.

Contraceptive Use

- In 2007, 62% of sexually active students used a condom at last sex, and 16% of sexually active students used birth control pills at last sex.
- Twice as many white students (21%) as black (9%) and Hispanic (9%) students reported using birth control pills before last sex.
- Among all high school students, those in 12th grade students were most likely to report using birth control pills before last sex, and least likely to report using a condom at last sex.
- Among non-Hispanic black students, the proportion who are sexually active and used a condom the last time they had sex was 69% in 2005 and 67% in 2007. Among non-Hispanic white students 63% reported using a condom at last sex in 2005 and 60% reported using a condom at last sex in 2007. Among Hispanic students 58% reported using a condom at last sex in 2005 and 61% reported using a condom at last sex in 2007.

- Between 2005 and 2007 there was no change in the proportion of sexually active 9th grade students who reported using a condom the last time they had sex (75% in 2005 and 69% in 2007). However, the proportion of sexually active 10th and 12th grade students who used a condom the last time they had sex remained essentially the same from 2005 to 2007 (from 65% to 66%, and from 55% to 54% respectively).
- There was also essentially no change between 2005 and 2007 in the proportion of sexually active students who used a condom the last time they had sex, or in the proportion of sexually active students who used the birth control pill the last time they had sex.
- Condom use at last sex has increased from 1991 to 2007 (46% to 62% respectively). However, birth control pill use at last sex has remained essentially unchanged from 1991 to 2007 (21% in 1991 to 16% in 2007).

Sex Before Age 13

- In 2007, 7% of high school students reported that they first had sex before age 13. This is compared to 6% in 2005.
- Between 1991 and 2007, the percentage of teens who reported having had sex before the age of 13 decreased from 10% to 7%.

Multiple Partners

- In 2007, 15% of high school students reported having already had four or more sexual partners—essentially unchanged from 2005 (14%).
- Boys (18%) are more likely than girls (12%) to report that they have had four or more partners.
- The number of sexual partners also differs according to race/ethnicity. Non-Hispanic black students (28%) are more likely than their Hispanic (17%) and non-Hispanic white peers (12%) to report that they have had four or more sexual partners.
- The proportion of students who have had four or more sexual partners decreased from 19% in 1991 to 15% in 2007.

Some Thoughts on the Data

When it comes to teen sexual behavior, pregnancy, and childbearing the message from the 2007 YRBS is simple: **Mission not accomplished.** The fact that there has been essentially no change in teens' sexual and contraceptive behavior—coupled with the recent news that the teen birth rate increased for the first time in 15 years—makes clear that we all must intensify and be more creative in our efforts to prevent too-early pregnancy and parenthood. Complacency is not an option.

A tale of two trends. As a general matter, on the teen sex front, the 1990s can be described as almost unrelentingly positive—during 1991 to 2001 the proportion of sexually experienced teens decreased 16 percent, and the proportion of sexually active teens who used condoms increased 25 percent. The current decade can fairly be characterized as running in place—there has been a 5 percent increase in the proportion of sexually experienced teens since 2001, and only a 6 percent increase in the proportion of sexually active teens who used condoms the last time they had sex.

Why the increases in teen sexual behavior and decreases in contraceptive use? No one really knows. Some possible explanations include:

- Complacency may have become the enemy of progress. Double digit years of declines in rates of teen pregnancy and birth may have diverted important attention, resources, and funding to other pressing issues.
- The early wins may have been won. Future efforts may well have to be more intense, focused, and creative if the nation is to make continued progress in reducing teen pregnancy and childbearing. Put another way, yesterday's way of doing business will no longer suffice.

About the Data

All data in this fact sheet are from the recently released Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), 2007. This survey is administered through the CDC every two years in high schools nationwide, and includes a variety of questions about risky behavior including questions about sex, drug and alcohol use, physical fitness, seatbelt use, and other issues. Approximately 14,000 students completed the questionnaire in 2007. The YRBS has been administered since 1991 thus provides interesting data about the behavior of high school students over time, and is particularly useful for monitoring trends. One important limitation of the data is that they are limited to youth in high school, and do not include students who have dropped out, were absent from school on the day of the survey, or older teens who have graduated from high school.

TABLE A. Youth Risk Behavior Survey - 1991 through 2007

	1991	1993	1995	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	Percent Change 1991-2001	Percent Change 2001-2007	Percent Change 2005-2007
Sexual Behaviors												
% Who Have Ever Had Sex	54.1	53.0	53.1	48.4	49.9	45.6	46.7	46.8	47.8	-15.7%	4.8%	2.1%
% Who Had Sex Before Age 13	10.2	9.2	9.0	7.2	8.3	6.6	7.4	6.2	7.1	-35.3%	7.6%	14.5%
% Sexually Active (sex in the past 3 months)	37.5	37.5	37.9	34.8	36.3	33.4	34.3	33.9	35.0	-10.9%	4.8%	3.2%
% Who Have Had Four or More Partners	18.7	18.7	17.8	16.0	16.2	14.2	14.4	14.3	14.9	-24.1%	4.9%	4.2%
% Who Were Ever Forced to Have Sex	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	7.7	9.0	7.5	7.8	N/A	1.3%	4.0%
% Who Experienced Dating Violence	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	9.5	8.9	9.2	9.9	N/A	4.2%	7.6%
Contraceptive Behaviors												
% Who Used a Condom at Last Sex	46.2	52.8	54.4	56.8	58.0	57.9	63.0	62.8	61.5	25.3%	6.2%	-2.1%
% Who Used the Birth Control Pill at Last Sex	20.8	18.4	17.4	16.6	16.2	18.2	17.0	17.6	16.0	-12.5%	-12.1%	-9.1%