



Adolescent Reproductive Health Tip Sheet



Adolescent Reproductive Health Overview

This Tip Sheet provides PREP grantees an overview of current data and information on adolescent reproductive health.

Since the early 1990s, teen pregnancy and birth rates have declined dramatically in the United States. This decline has been driven by a decrease in the proportion of teens who report having ever had sex, and an increase in the proportion of teens who report using a method of contraception when they have sex. While there were significant changes in teen behavior related to sexual health outcomes between the mid-1990s and early 2000s, recent data suggest that previous gains in behavior might have stalled. In addition, the United States continues to have the highest teen pregnancy and birth rates compared to other developed countries. It is also the case that although 15–24-year-olds are only one-quarter of the sexually active population, they account for nearly half all new cases of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) each year.

Teen Sexual Behavior

Fewer than half of all teens report that they have ever had sex (42% of girls and 43% of boys). The proportion of teens who have ever had sex (i.e. are sexually experienced) has decreased significantly since the early 1990s. This decline has been particularly dramatic among teen boys. However, there was no change in the percent of sexually experienced teens (boys or girls) between 2002 and 2006-2008 (note that due to changes in data collection, most data from the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) are for the time period 2006-2008).¹ Not surprisingly, the proportion of sexually experienced teens increases with age. Data from the 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) indicate that while 32% of 9th grade students have ever had sex, 62% of 12th grade students have had sex.² For most teens, their first sexual partner is someone that they are seriously dating – 75% of girls and 58% of boys report this to be the case. In addition, most teens report having relatively few partners; sexual activity among teens is infrequent and sporadic.¹

Other Key Data on Teen Sexual Behavior:

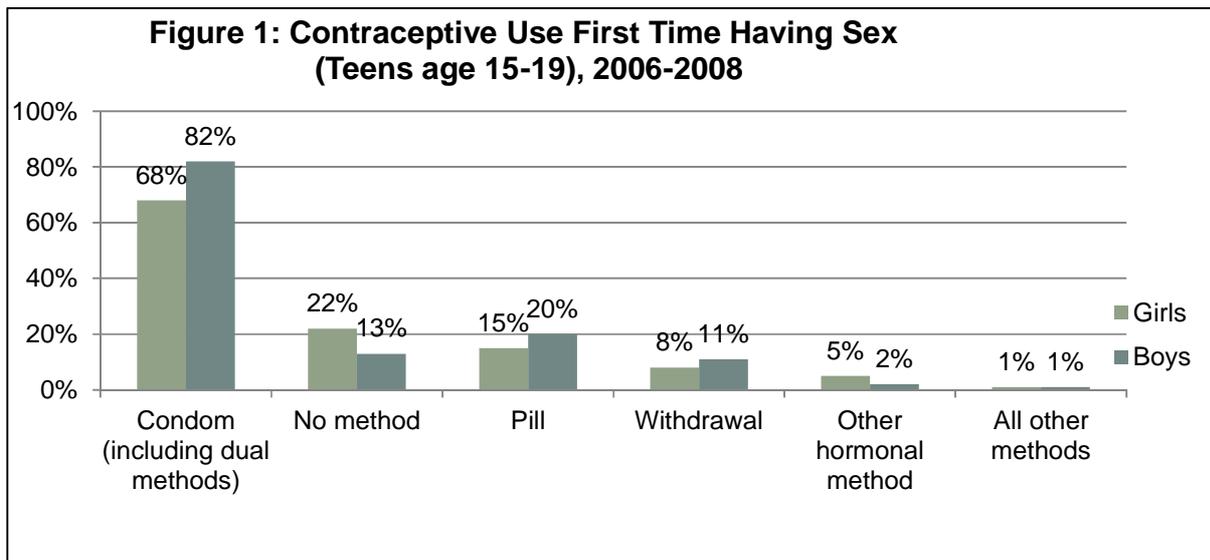
- A higher proportion of black students (65%), American Indian/Alaska Native students (59%), Latino students (49%) and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander students (48%) have ever had sex compared to white students (42%) and Asian students (24%). Overall, 46% of high school students have ever had sex.²
- While nearly half of teens have ever had sex, less than one-third (29% of boys and 31% of girls) are currently sexually active; that is, they have had sex in the past 3 months.¹
- Among teens who have not yet had sex, the most common reason for not having done so is because it is against their religion or morals (42% of girls, 35% of boys). Approximately 1 in 5 girls report that not wanting to get pregnant is the main reason they haven't had sex (18%) but only about 1 in 10 boys cited not wanting to get a partner pregnant as the main reason (12%).¹

Teen Contraceptive Use

Most sexually experienced teens are familiar with contraception—the majority report that they used some form of contraception the first time they had sex, and many also report that they used a method the most recent time they had sex. Condoms and pills are the most common methods; use of other methods is fairly low. While this is positive news, progress on this front also seems to be slowing. In fact, after increasing by approximately one-third during the 1990s, contraceptive use among teens (including condoms) has been stagnant since the early 2000s.^{1,2}

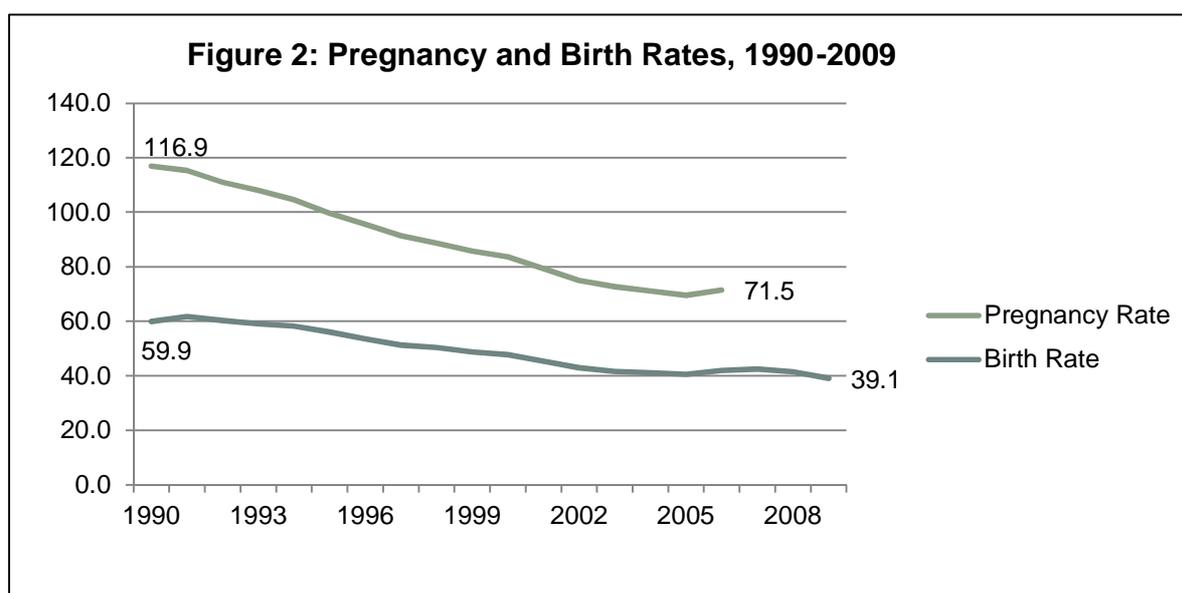
Other Key Data on Teen Contraceptive Use:

- Ninety-six percent of sexually experienced teen girls have *ever* used a method of contraception—95% have ever used a condom; 58% have ever used withdrawal; and 55% have ever used birth control pills.¹
- Among sexually experienced teens, 79% of girls and 87% of boys used a method of contraception the first time they had sex. Most reported using a condom—68% of girls and 82% of boys.¹
- Among sexually active teens (those who have had sex in the past three months), 84% of girls and 93% of boys report that they used some method of contraception the most recent time they had sex.¹ Although the use of contraception at most recent sex did not increase for either teen boys or teen girls between 2002 and 2006-2008, the use of a hormonal method and a condom, or dual use, did increase among teen boys from 24% in 2002 to 35% in 2006-2008.¹ Dual use among teen girls remained relatively stable at 21% in 2006-2008.¹



Teen Pregnancy and Childbearing

Teen pregnancy and birth rates in the United States have decreased about one-third since peaking in the early 1990s, with some slight increases between 2005 and 2007.³ Though the rates for both are down in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and among all racial/ethnic groups, disparities continue. Pregnancy and birth rates remain higher for black and Latina teens than for white teens, and higher for 18- and 19-year-olds than for younger teens. Progress has been slower for some states than others, mostly those concentrated in the South, southwest, and Delta region of the country. It also remains the case that the United States continues to have much higher rates of teen pregnancy and childbearing compared to other developed countries.

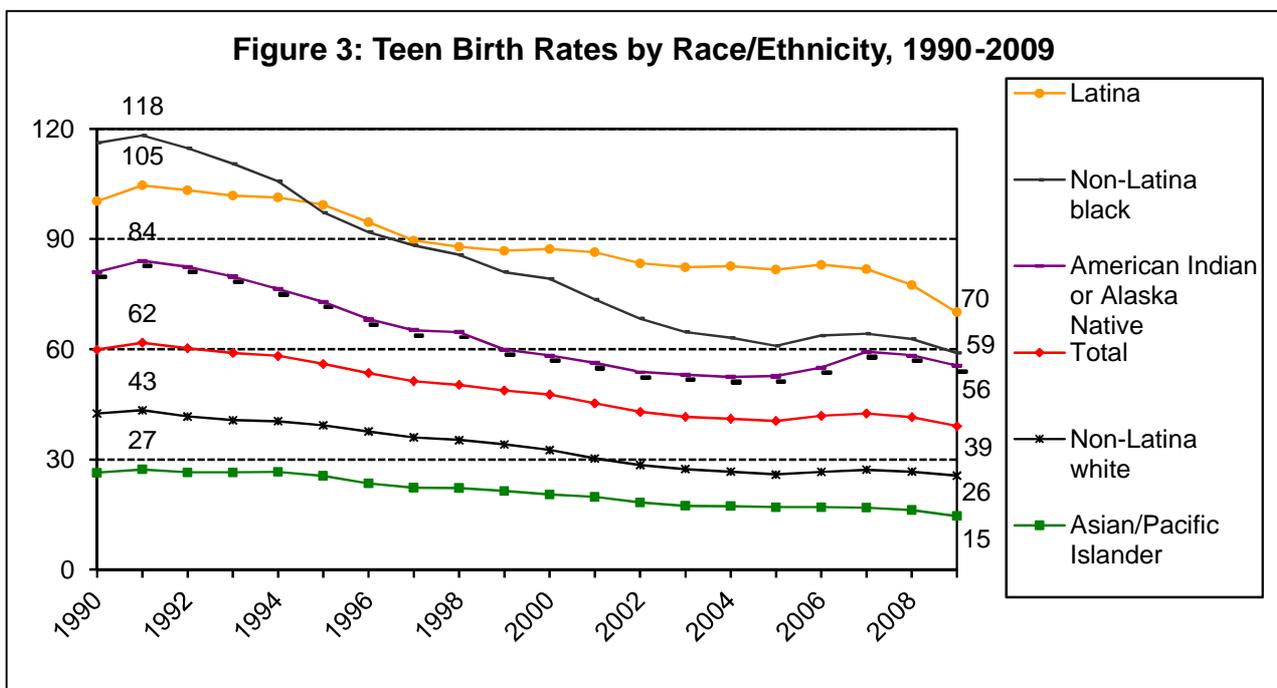


Other Key Data on Teen Pregnancy:

- The teen pregnancy rate in 2006 (the last year for which data are available) was 72 per 1,000 teens age 15-19. In other words, 7% of teen girls — approximately 750,000 girls — get pregnant *each* year.³
- Cumulatively, three in 10 girls in the United States will get pregnant at least once before turning 20.³
- The teen pregnancy rate peaked in 1990 at 117 pregnancies per 1,000 teens age 15-19, and decreased 39% between 1990 and 2005. The rate increased slightly (3%) between 2005 and 2006.³
- The teen pregnancy rate among older teens (age 18-19) is about three times that of the teen pregnancy rate among younger teens (age 15-17) — 122 per 1,000 compared to 40 per 1,000.³
- Rates of pregnancy among black teens decreased 44% between 1990 and 2006, and 22% among Latinas during the same time period. Overall, however, Latina and black teens have the highest rates of teen pregnancy — 127 per 1,000 and 126 per 1,000 respectively.³
- State specific teen pregnancy rates in 2005 ranged from a low of 33 pregnancies per 1,000 teens age 15-19 in New Hampshire to a high of 93 pregnancies per 1,000 in New Mexico.³

Other Key Data on Teen Childbearing:

- In 2009 (the most recent data available), the teen birth rate reached a record low of 39.1 births per 1,000 teen girls age 15-19.⁴ Overall there has been a 37% decrease in the teen birth rate from 1991 to 2009 despite a slight increase from 2005 to 2007.⁴
- Older teens (age 18-19), have the highest rate of teen births, accounting for two-thirds of all teen births in the United States.⁴
- Despite persistent disparities, the teen birth rate has decreased among teens from every racial/ethnic group. Between 1991 and 2009, the teen birth rate dropped:
 - 33% among Latinas (from 104.6 to 70.1);
 - 34% among American Indian or Alaska Native teen girls (from 84.1 to 55.5);
 - 41% among non-Latina whites (from 43.4 to 25.6);
 - 47% among Asian or Pacific Islander teen girls (from 27.3 to 14.6); and
 - 50% among non-Latina blacks (from 118.2 to 59.0).⁴
- Most births to teens are first births (81%), and 87% of births to teens are to unmarried teens.⁴
- State-specific teen birth rates in 2009 ranged from a low of 16 per 1,000 teens age 15-19 in New Hampshire to a high of 64 per 1,000 in Mississippi.⁴



Teens and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

Teens and young adults comprise a large portion of reported STIs in the United States. Estimating the number of STIs and trends in STI rates is challenging—the existing numbers are widely considered to be underestimates, because many STIs are asymptomatic and thus might go unnoticed and unreported. In addition, in recent years there have been several efforts focused on decreasing the stigma associated with testing for STIs and encouraging people to get tested and treated. Thus, changes in the rates of STIs could be due to a true increase in STIs in the population, or due to an increase in the number of cases that are actually reported because of increased access to testing.

Other Key Data on STIs:

- In 2008, there were approximately 1,900 teens age 13-19 diagnosed with **HIV infection**, accounting for approximately 5% of all people who received an HIV diagnosis.⁵
- Despite the fact that young people age 15-24 account for only one-quarter of the sexually experienced population, they acquire approximately half of all STIs.⁵
- In 2009, as in previous years, teen girls age 15–19 years had the highest rate of **chlamydia and gonorrhea** compared with any other age or sex group.⁵
- Although syphilis rates are highest among women age 20-24, **syphilis** rates among teen girls aged 15–19 years have increased annually since 2004.⁵
- Syphilis rates for teen boys age 15-19 are much lower than those of older men.⁵

Teens' Attitudes and Beliefs about Sex, Contraception, and Relationships

It is also helpful to understand teens' attitudes toward sex, contraception, relationships and pregnancy. Most teen pregnancy prevention programs focus on changing teens' knowledge and attitudes about these topics in an effort to influence their behavior. Many teens report mixed feelings about their first sexual experience; those who had sex at a younger age are more likely to say that they regret having sex than those who waited until they were older. Somewhat consistent with this, many teens believe that a sexual relationship between 18-year-olds is acceptable if they have strong feelings for each other, but far fewer say the same for a sexual relationship between 16-year-olds. Sexually active teens also overwhelmingly report positive attitudes about condoms—they feel comfortable using them as well as discussing condom use with their partners. Almost all teens report that avoiding a pregnancy right now is also important to them, but some admit that they would be at least a little pleased if they were to become pregnant or get a partner pregnant right now. While most teens say that they have all of the information they need to avoid an unplanned pregnancy, many report that they know a little or nothing about basic contraceptive methods such as condoms.

Other Key Data on Attitudes:

- Forty-seven percent of girls and 34% of boys who had sex in their teen years report that they had mixed feelings about their first sexual experience.⁶
- Twenty-seven percent of teen girls and 39% of teen boys agree with the statement “it is ok for unmarried 16 year olds to have sexual relations if they have strong affection for each other”.¹ Comparatively, 60% of teen girls and 68% of teen boys agree with this statement if the age is changed to 18 year olds.¹
- Seventy-eight percent of teens believe that they have all of the information they need to avoid an unplanned pregnancy. However, nearly half (49%) report that they know a little or nothing about male condoms and how to use them.⁶
- Ninety-six percent of teen girls and 86% of teen boys agree that they or their partner would appreciate it if they used a condom.¹
- When asked what would happen if faced with a pregnancy at this point in their lives, 69% of teen girls and 71% of teen boys say that it would be a real challenge and they don't know how they would manage.⁶ Twenty-four percent of girls and 22% of boys said that it would make their life more challenging, but they could manage.⁶
- In general, the vast majority of teens (94%) report that it is either very important or somewhat important to avoid getting pregnant or getting someone pregnant at this point in their lives.⁶ At the same time, a small proportion of teens report that they would be either very pleased or a little pleased if they or their partner were to get pregnant now (14% of girls and 18% of boys).¹
- Teens consistently report that when it comes to their decisions about sex, their parents most influence their decisions (46%).⁶ Only 20% of teens report that their friends most influence their decisions.⁶

References

- ¹ Abma, JC, Martinez, GM, Copen, DE (2010). Teenagers in the United States: Sexual Activity, Contraceptive Use, and Childbearing, National Survey of Family Growth 2006-2008. *National Center for Health Statistics, Vital Health Statistic*, 23 (30).
- ² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2010) Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance — United States, 2009. *Surveillance Summaries, MMWR* 59(No. SS-#5).
- ³ Kost, K., Henshaw, S., & Carlin, L. (2010). *U.S. Teenage Pregnancies, Births and Abortions: National and State Trends and Trends by Race and Ethnicity*. Retrieved from <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/USTPtrends.pdf>.
- ⁴ Hamilton, BE, Martin, JA, & Ventura, SJ (2010). Births: Preliminary Data for 2009. *National Vital Statistics Reports*, 59(3).
- ⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2010). *Sexually Transmitted Disease Surveillance 2009. Special Focus Profiles: STDs in Adolescents and Young Adults*. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/std/stats09/adol.htm>
- ⁶ Albert, B. (2010). *With One Voice 2010: America's Adults and Teens Sound Off about Teen Pregnancy Prevention*. Washington, DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.

Resources

Data on Sexual and Contraceptive Behavior:

Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/yrbs/index.htm>
The National Survey of Family Growth: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nsfg.htm>

Data on Pregnancy and Childbearing:

The National Center for Health Statistics: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/births.htm>
The Guttmacher Institute: www.guttmacher.org

Data on STIs:

STDs in Adolescents and Young Adults: <http://www.cdc.gov/std/stats09/adol.htm>

Data on Knowledge and Attitudes:

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy: www.thenationalcampaign.org
State specific data: <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/state-data/state-comparisons.asp?ID=3>

Other General Resources:

The Guttmacher Institute: www.guttmacher.org
The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy: www.thenationalcampaign.org
National Adolescent Health Information Center <http://nahic.ucsf.edu/>
Child Trends, DataBank <http://www.childtrends.databank.org/>