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**HEALTH & FITNESS**

**Younger and more restless: Study: 1 in 5 middle schoolers has had sex**

by **Michael Lasalandra**  
 Tuesday, May 20, 2003

One in five middle school students has had sexual intercourse, with one in seven of those girls who are sexually experienced getting pregnant, a large national study has found.

"If people think teens are not having sex in middle school, they're wrong," said Sarah Brown, director of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, which released the report yesterday.

The study found that while the proportion of teenage girls ages 15 to 19 who have had sexual intercourse declined between 1988 and 1995, the proportion of those who have had intercourse at age 14 or younger nearly doubled during that time.

The study, which combined data from three large national studies and four smaller regional data surveys taken in the mid- to late-1990s, is considered the first comprehensive examination of the sexual activities of young adolescents.

But Brown said more recent data on pregnancy rates and newer surveys of the sexual activities of teens indicates the situation may be improving.

"If you look at the teen pregnancy rates over the last 10 years, they've been going steadily down," she said. "It has been progress, but the rates are still too high. You can celebrate the good news, but you also have a long way to go."

The good news is that the pregnancy rate for both groups of teen girls has declined, 27 percent for the older group and 40 percent for the younger one.

That may reflect the use of contraception. The study found that up to three-quarters of youths ages 15 to 19 had used contraception the first time they had sex.

The study also found that about half of those in the 12 to 14 age group reported having been on a date or in a romantic relationship in the prior 12 months.

These teens also had ample opportunity to have sex, the study found. For example, one-third of 12- to 14-year-olds said they had been at a party without any adults in the house.

And there were negative consequences associated with sex in many cases, the study found. For example, the youngsters described their sexual activities as being "unwanted" in that, while voluntary, they regretted to have sex when they did.

Those who were sexually experienced were also more likely to engage in other risky behaviors such as drinking and drug use.

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