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For Young, Sex Falls in Survey

Fewer teenagers and young adults are having sex, a government survey shows.

The study, released Thursday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is based on interviews with about 5,300 young people, ages 15 to 24. It shows that the proportion in that age group who said they had never had oral, vaginal or anal sex rose in the past decade to about 28 percent, from 22 percent.

The survey is considered the largest and most reliable on sexuality.

Anjani Chandra, a health scientist for the centers, described the decline as small but significant. She declined to speculate on the reasons. It is difficult to look for a trend earlier than 2002 because previous surveys did not gather as much detail about various types of sex, she added.

Data over the years on vaginal intercourse among never-married adolescents, however, show a steady decline since 1988. That seems to be in sync with other studies by the centers showing a drop in teenage pregnancy.

That the trend began in the late 1980s seems to undermine the idea that abstinence-only sex education, heavily emphasized during the administration of President George W. Bush, is the explanation, said Bill Albert, chief program officer for the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.

But it is possible those messages contributed, he added.

The study, based on interviews from 2006 through 2008, showed that 27 percent of young men and 29 percent of young women reported no sexual contact.