

Fast Facts

Teen Sexual Behavior and Contraceptive Use: Data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2009

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 used a condom the last time they had sex and only one-in five used birth control pills the last time they had sex.

The Data

Teen Sexual Experience

- In 2009, 46% of all high school students reported ever having had sexual intercourse—46% of girls and 46% of boys.
- Between 2007 and 2009 the proportion of students who ever had sex essentially remained unchanged. In 2007, 48% of all high school students reported having sex compared to 46% in 2009—a statistically insignificant change.
- The proportion of high school students who have ever had sexual intercourse declined from 54% in 1991 to 46% in 2009.

Sexually Active Teens

- In 2009, more than one-third (34%) 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 33% of boys reported being sexually active.
- In 2009, 48% of non-Hispanic black students, 35% of Hispanic students, and 32% of non-Hispanic white students reported being sexually active.
- Nearly half (49%) of all 12th grade students reported being sexually active compared to 21% of 9th grade students.

- Between 2007 and 2009 the proportion of students who were sexually active remained unchanged (35% in 2007 vs. 34% in 2009). Between 1991 and 2009 there was a slight decrease in the proportion of sexually active high school students from 38% in 1991 to 34% in 2009.

Contraceptive Use

- In 2009, 61% of sexually active students reported using a condom the last time they had sex, and 20% of sexually active students reported using birth control pills the last time they had sex.
- Non-Hispanic white students were three times (27%) more likely to report using birth control pills before last sex compared to non-Hispanic black students (8%). Eleven percent of Hispanic students reported using birth control pills before last sex.
- Among all high school students, those in 12th grade were most likely to report using birth control pills before last sex, and least likely to report using a condom the last time they had sex.
- In 2007, 67% of sexually active non-Hispanic black students used a condom the last time they had sex compared to 62% in 2009. In 2007, 60% of sexually active non-Hispanic white students used a condom at last sex compared to 63% in 2009. In 2007, 60% of sexually active Hispanic students reported using a condom at last sex compared to 55% in 2009.
- Between 2007 and 2009 there was a slight decrease in the proportion of sexually active 9th grade students who reported using a condom the last time they had sex (69% in 2007 and 64% in 2009). However, the proportion of sexually active 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students who used a condom the last time they had sex remained essentially the

same from 2007 to 2009 (from 66% to 68% for 10th graders, from 62% to 61% for 11th graders, and from 54% to 55% for 12th graders).

- There was also essentially no change between 2007 and 2009 in the proportion of sexually active 9th, 10th, or 12th grade students who used the birth control pill the last time they had sex (from 9% to 10% for 9th graders, from 12% to 15% for 10th graders, and from 24% to 28% for 12th graders). There was a slight increase in the proportion of sexually active 11th grade students who used the birth control pill the last time they had sex (from 15% to 21%).
- Condom use at last sex has increased from 1991 to 2009 (from 46% to 61%). However, birth control pill use at last sex has remained essentially unchanged from 1991 (21%) to 2009 (20%).

Sex Before Age 13

- In 2009, 6% of high school students reported that they first had sex before age 13 compared to 7% in 2007.
- Between 1991 and 2009, the percentage of teens who reported having had sex before the age of 13 decreased from 10% to 6%.

Multiple Partners

- In 2009, 14% of high school students reported having already had four or more sexual partners—essentially unchanged from 2007 (15%).
- Boys (16%) are more likely than girls (11%) 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 (14%) and non-Hispanic white peers (11%) to report that they have had four or more sexual partners in 2009.
- The proportion of students who have had four or more sexual partners decreased from 19% in 1991 to 14% in 2009.

Some Thoughts on the Data

When it comes to teen sexual behavior, pregnancy, and child-bearing the message from the 2009 YRBS is simple: **Progress has stalled.** The fact that there has been essentially no change in teens'

sexual and contraceptive behavior 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. On the teen sex front, the 1990s can be described as almost unrelentingly positive—the proportion of sexually experienced teens decreased 15%, and the proportion of sexually active teens who used condoms increased 32%. However, the current decade can fairly be characterized as running in place—there has been essentially no change in the proportion of teens who have had sex since 2001, and condom use among sexually active teens seems to have stalled as well.

Why have the changes in teen sexual behavior and contraceptive use stalled? 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 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), 2009. This survey is administered through the CDC every two years in grades 9-12 in 42 states and 20 local education and health agencies, 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 16,000 students completed the questionnaire in 2009. The YRBS has been administered since 1991 thus providing 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.

FIGURE 1. Youth Risk Behavior Survey - 1991 through 2009

	1991	1993	1995	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	Change '91-'09	Change '07-'09
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	46.0	Decrease	None
% Who Had Sex Before Age 13	10.2	9.2	8.9	7.2	8.3	6.6	7.4	6.2	7.1	5.9	Decrease	None
% 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	34.2	Decrease	None
% 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	13.8	Decrease	None
% 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	7.4	N/A	None
% Who Experienced Dating Violence	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	8.8	9.5	8.9	9.2	9.9	9.8	N/A	None
% Who Used Alcohol or Drugs at Last Sex	21.6	21.3	24.8	24.7	24.8	25.6	25.4	23.3	22.5	21.6	Increase '91-'01 Decrease '01-'09	None
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	61.1	Increase '91-'03 None '03-'09	None
% 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	19.8	None	Increase