

Says: Teen Contraceptive Use



Teen pregnancy and birth rates have decreased by approximately one third since the early 1990s.¹ Studies suggest that these declines are due to both a decrease in the proportion of teens having sex and to an increase in contraceptive use among teens having sex.² This *Science Says* issue brief presents information on contraceptive use among sexually experienced³ teens, including:

- trends in contraceptive use,
- the proportion who have *ever* used contraception,
- types of contraception used,
- consistency of contraceptive use, and
- reasons why teen girls stop using contraception.

Methodology

This research brief uses data from the 1988, 1995 and 2002 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG)—the premier source of national information on teen sexual behavior—and the 1988 and 1995 National Survey of Adolescent Males (NSAM). Most of the information in this brief refers to contraceptive use in 2002, unless otherwise noted. Readers should note that the 1988 and 1995 NSFG included data for teen girls only; therefore, male data reported for 1988 and 1995 are from NSAM. Data presented in this brief refers to teens aged 15-19, unless otherwise noted. In this document, older teens are those aged 18-19 years and younger teens are those aged 15-17 years. Differences among various groups are not statistically significant⁴ unless they are noted; the word “significantly” refers to a statistically significant difference throughout this document. Some racial/ethnic specific data are not presented due to small sample sizes.

Highlights

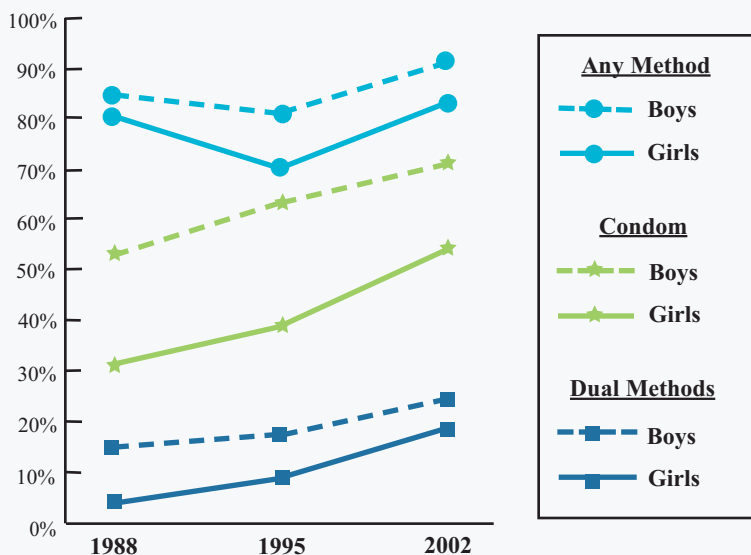
- Contraceptive use* by teens at last sex—for both boys and girls—increased between 1995 and 2002. Teen boys are more likely than teen girls to say they used contraception the last time they had sex.
- Almost all sexually experienced teen girls say they have used a method of contraception.
- Although a majority of teens report using a condom the first time they had sex, more than one-quarter of teen girls and almost one in five teen boys did *not use* a method of contraception the first time they had sex.
- More than eight in ten sexually active⁵ teen girls and fully nine in ten sexually active teen boys used a method of contraception the last time they had sex—condoms were the most common method of contraception used.
- Close to two-thirds of sexually active teen girls and more than three-quarters of sexually active teen boys say they used contraception both the first and last times they had sex.
- In general, teen boys are more likely than teen girls to have used a condom every time they had sex in the past year.
- As a general matter, Hispanic teens are less likely than teens from other racial/ethnic groups to use contraception.
- Teen girls report that the primary reason why they stopped using contraception is because of “side effects.”
- In general, the older teens are when they first have sex, the more likely they are to use contraception.
- Teen girls have similar patterns of contraceptive use compared to women in their twenties. Teens were, in fact, more likely than older women to use a condom or use both a condom and a hormonal method of contraception the last time they had sex.

* Contraception includes: pill, Depo-Provera injectable, Lunelle injectable, Norplant implants, condom, IUD, female condom, diaphragm, cervical cap, spermicidal foam, jelly, cream or suppository, sponge, periodic abstinence, withdrawal, and “other” methods.

Trends in Contraceptive Use⁶

The percentage of never-married, sexually active teens who used a method of contraception the last time they had sex has increased over time for both boys and girls. Specifically, the percentage of never-married teens who reported using some method of contraception the last time they had sex decreased from 1988 to 1995, but increased from 1995 to 2002. Among never-married females, 80% used some method at last sex in 1988, 71% used some method at last sex in 1995 and 83% used some method at last sex in 2002. Among never-married teen boys, 84% used some method at last sex in 1988, 82% used some method at last sex in 1995, and 91% used some method at last sex in 2002. In addition, the proportion of never-married teens who used a condom the last time they had sex, or used dual methods of contraception at last sex (both a hormonal method and a condom) has increased dramatically since 1988 (Figure 1). Contraceptive use also increased between 1995 and 2002 among non-Hispanic white teens and non-Hispanic black teens (data on Hispanic teens are not available).

FIGURE 1: Trends in Contraceptive Use at Last Sex Among Never-Married, Sexually Active Teens, 1988, 1995, 2002

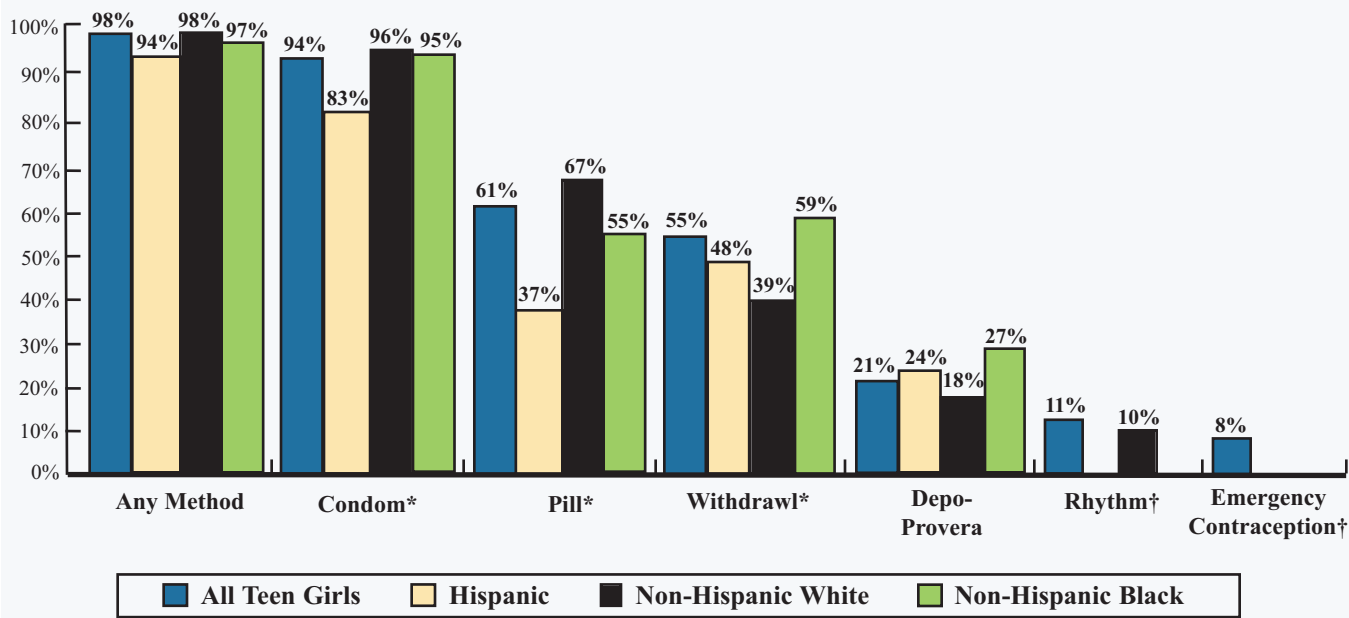


Other Sexual Activity

- Almost all sexually experienced teen girls report that they have ever used some method of contraception (98%).

- More than 9 in 10 (94%) sexually experienced teen girls have ever used a condom, 6 in 10 (61%) have ever used the pill, and more than half (55%) have ever used withdrawal as a method of contraception.

FIGURE 2: Percent Sexually Experienced Teen Girls Who Have Ever Used a Specified Method of Contraception by Race/Ethnicity, NSFG 2002



* Difference between racial/ethnic groups is statistically significant ($p \leq 0.05$)

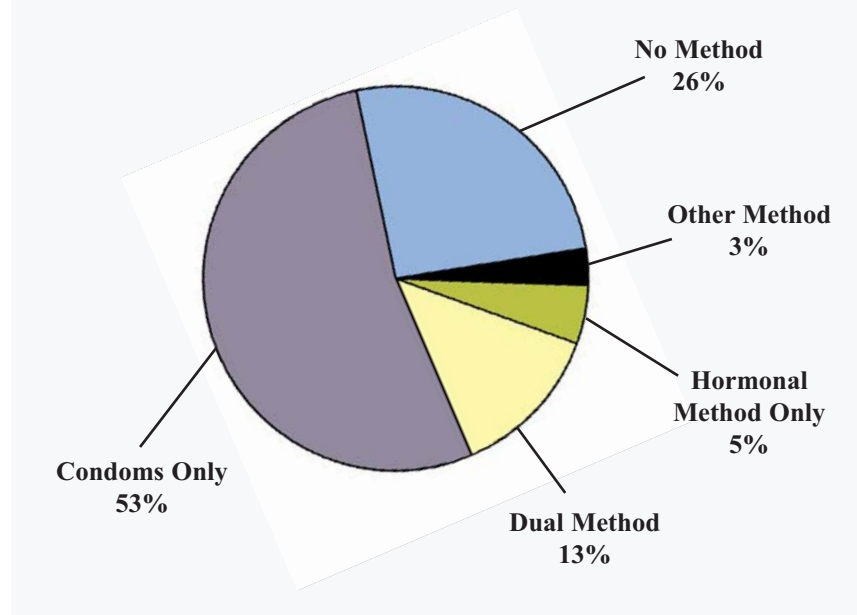
† Denotes that the sample sizes were too small for reliable estimates in absent categories.

Contraceptive Use at First Sex Among Sexually Experienced Teens

Any Method

Approximately three-quarters (74%) of all sexually experienced teen girls, and more than eight out of ten (82%) sexually experienced teen boys used a method of contraception the first time they had sex (Figure 3 and 4). About the same proportion of older and younger girls used a method of contraception the first time they had sex (74% and 75% respectively), and slightly more younger boys than older boys used a method of contraception the first time they had sex (85% vs. 80%). In general, a smaller proportion of Hispanic teens—both boys (73%) and girls (66%)—used a method of contraception the first time they had sex compared to their non-Hispanic white (85% boys and 78% girls) and non-Hispanic black peers (86% boys and 71% girls). These differences are not statistically significant.

FIGURE 3: Methods of Contraceptive Use at First Sex Among Sexually Experienced Teen Girls, NSFG 2002

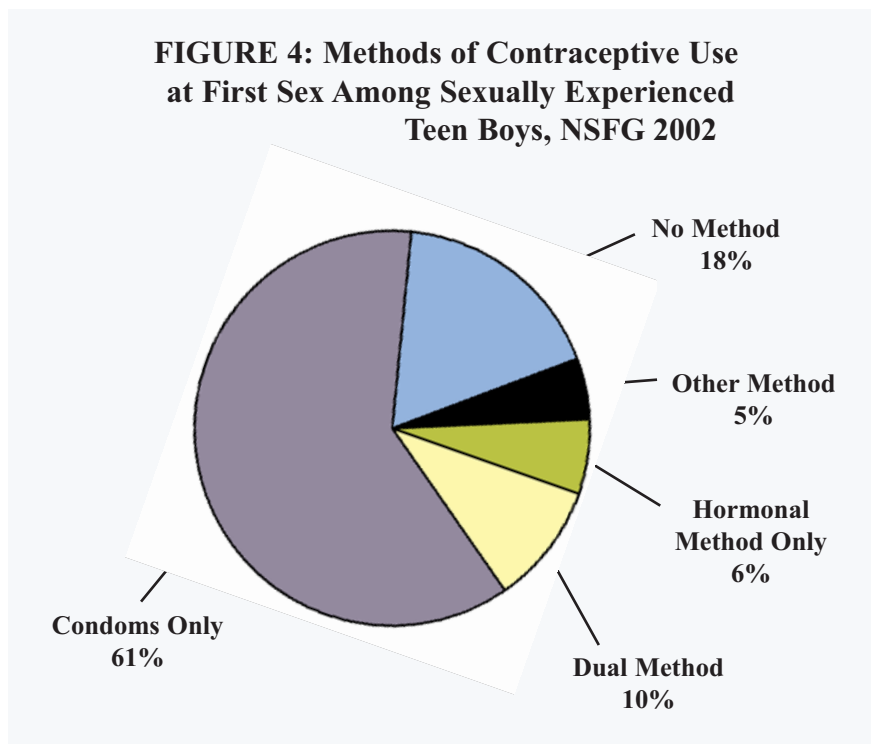


Condom Use

Among teens, the most common method of contraception used at first sex is the male condom—71% of sexually experienced teen boys and 66% of sexually experienced teen girls used a condom the first time they had sex.

Similar proportions of older and younger teen girls used a condom the first time they had sex (66% and 67% respectively). However, younger teen boys (76%) were more likely than older teen boys (67%) to have used a condom. This difference is not statistically significant.

FIGURE 4: Methods of Contraceptive Use at First Sex Among Sexually Experienced Teen Boys, NSFG 2002



Differences in the proportion of teen girls and boys who used a condom the first time they had sex vary significantly according to race/ethnicity. Among girls, non-Hispanic white teens (72%) are more likely than both non-Hispanic black (61%) and Hispanic teens (55%) to have used a condom the first time they had sex. Among boys, non-Hispanic black teens (85%) are more likely than non-Hispanic white (68%) and Hispanic teens (67%) to have used a condom at first sex.

Dual Use, Hormonal Use, and Withdrawal at First Sex

	All Teens Aged 15-19	Younger Teens Aged 15-17	Older Teens Aged 18-19	Hispanic Teens (Aged 15-19)	Non-Hispanic White Teens (Aged 15-19)	Non-Hispanic Black Teens (aged 15-19)
Percent Girls who Used Dual Methods (both a condom and a hormonal method)	13%	12%	14%	--	15%	--
Percent Boys who Used Dual Methods (both a condom and a hormonal method)	10%	12%	9%	--	12%	--
Percent Girls who Used Hormonal Method	19%	16%	20%	--	19%	18%
Percent Boys who Used a Hormonal Method	17%	20%	15%	--	21%	--
Percent Girls who Used Withdrawal	8%	--	--	--	8%	--
Percent Boys who Used Withdrawal	10%	--	12%	--	13%	--

-- Denotes that the sample size was too small for reliable estimates.

Age of First Sex and Contraceptive Use

In general, the older teens are when they first have sex, the more likely they are to use contraception (Figure 5). Among teen girls who first had sex at age 14 or younger, 65% used some method of contraception the first time they had sex compared to 76% of those who were 15 or 16 when they first had sex and 83% who were 17 or older when they first had sex. In addition, the percentage of teen girls who used dual methods of contraception the first time they had sex increases with age of first sex. One in ten teen girls who first had sex at age 14 or younger used dual methods of contraception compared to 13% of those who first had sex at age 15 or 16 and 17% of those who waited until they were at least 17.

Among teen boys who first had sex at age 14 or younger, 76% used a method of contraception compared to 88% who

were 15 or 16 when they first had sex and 80% who were 17 or older. In terms of dual contraceptive use, 8% of boys under 15 used dual methods of

contraception the first time they had sex compared to 12% who were 15 or 16 the first time they had sex and 11% who were 17 or older.

FIGURE 5: Contraceptive Use at First Sex by Age at First Sex, NSFG 2002

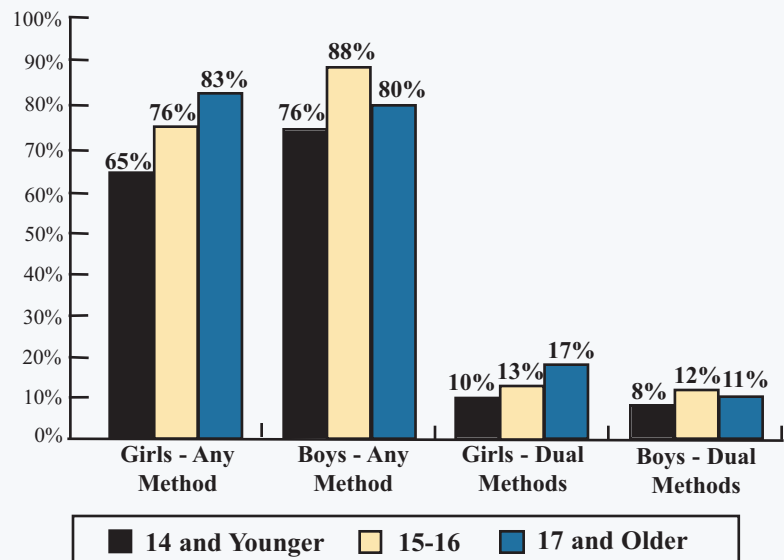
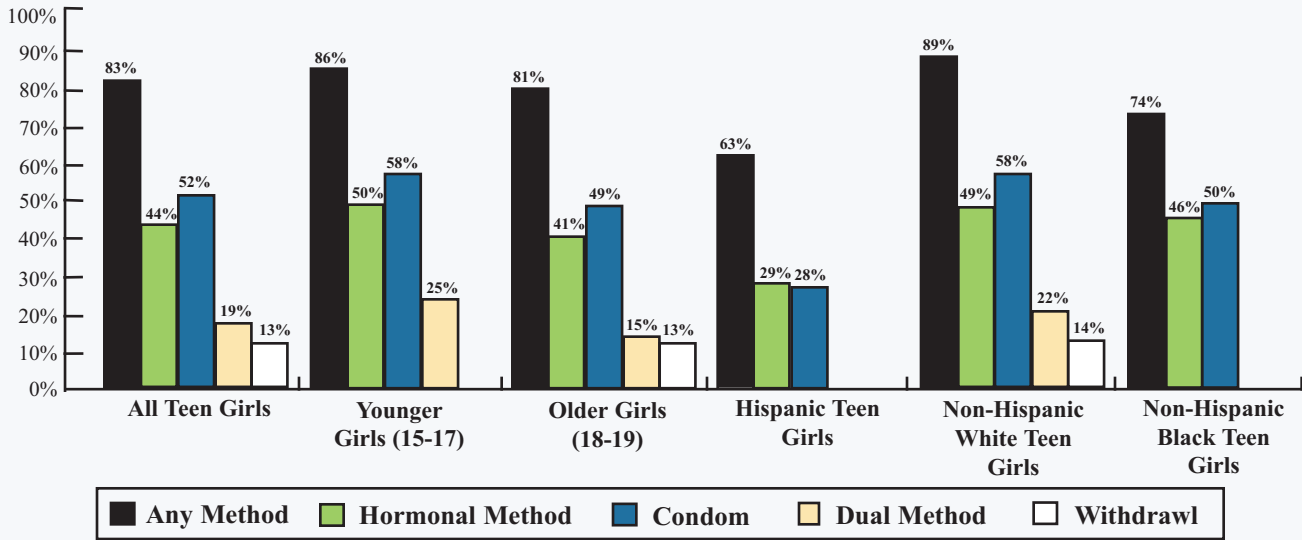


FIGURE 6: Contraceptive Use at Last Sex Among Sexually Experienced Teen Girls, NSFG 2002



Contraceptive Use at Last Sex Among Sexually Active Teens

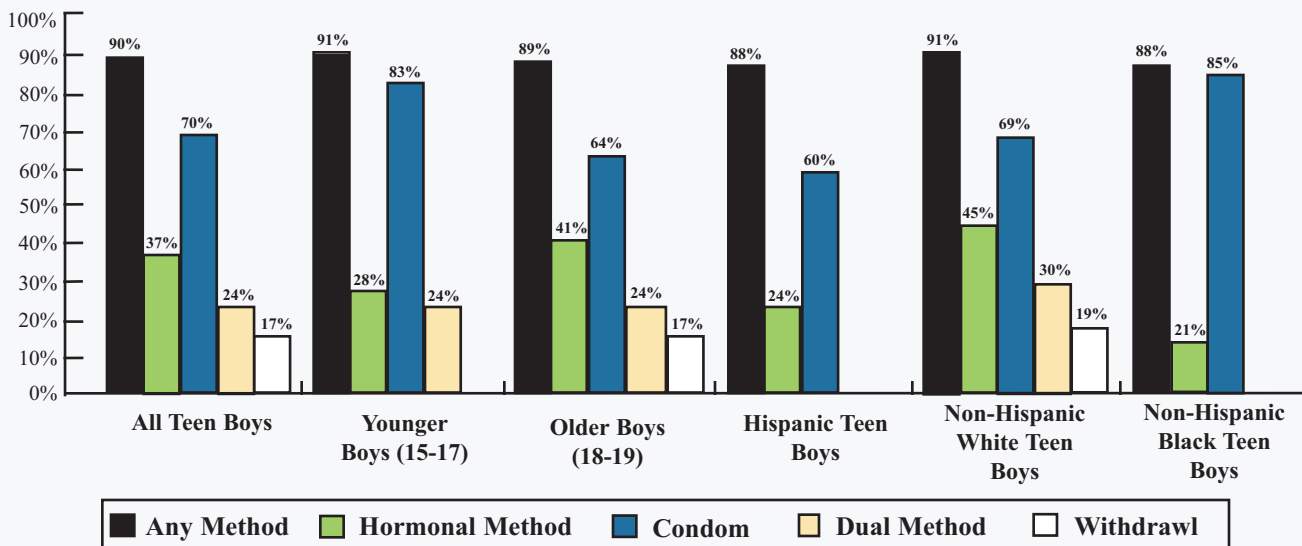
Any Method

More than eight in ten sexually active teen girls (those who have had sex in the three months before being interviewed) and fully nine in ten sexually active teen boys used a method of contraception the last time they had sex. Younger teens were slightly more likely than older

teens to have used contraception at last sex. Eighty-six percent of sexually active younger teen girls and 91% of sexually active younger teen boys used a method of contraception the last time they had sex compared to 81% of sexually active older teen girls and 89% of sexually active older teen boys. Among sexually active teen girls, the proportion who used contraception at last sex varies significantly according to race/ethnicity. Less than two-thirds of sexually active Hispanic teen girls

(63%) used contraception at last sex compared to three-fourths of sexually active non-Hispanic black teen girls (74%) and 89% of sexually active non-Hispanic white teen girls. There were no racial/ethnic differences among sexually active teen boys. Slightly more than nine in ten sexually active non-Hispanic white teen boys (91%) used contraception at last sex compared to 88% of both Hispanic and non-Hispanic black teen boys.

FIGURE 7: Contraceptive Use at Last Sex Among Sexually Experienced Teen Boys, NSFG 2002



Condom Use

As with contraceptive use at first sex, a majority of sexually active teens used a condom the last time they had sex. More than two-thirds of sexually active teen boys (70%) and more than half of sexually active teen girls (52%) used a condom the last time they had sex. Younger teen girls (58%) were more likely than older girls (49%) to

have used a condom at last sex. This difference is not statistically significant. More than eight in ten sexually active younger teen boys (83%) used a condom at last sex—significantly more than sexually active older teen boys (64%).

Differences in condom use at last sex vary significantly by race/ethnicity for both boys and girls. Eighty-five percent

of non-Hispanic black teen boys used a condom at last sex compared to 69% of non-Hispanic white teen boys and 60% of Hispanic teen boys. More than half of sexually active non-Hispanic white teen girls (58%) used a condom at last sex compared to half of sexually active non-Hispanic black (50%) and less than one-third of sexually active Hispanic teen girls (28%).

Dual Use and Hormonal Use at Last Sex

	All Teens Aged 15-19	Younger Teens Aged 15-17	Older Teens Aged 18-19	Hispanic Teens (Aged 15-19)	Non-Hispanic White Teens (Aged 15-19)	Non-Hispanic Black Teens (aged 15-19)
Percent Girls who Used Dual Methods (both a condom and a hormonal method)	19%*	25%*	15%*	--	22%	--
Percent Boys who Used Dual Methods (both a condom and a hormonal method)	24%	24%	24%	--	30%	--
Percent Girls who Used Hormonal Methods (the pill, Depo-Provera, emergency contraception, and the contraceptive patch)	44%	50%	41%	29%†	49%†	46%†
Percent Boys who Used a Hormonal Method	37%*	28%*	41%*	24%†	45%†	21%†
Percent Girls who Used Withdrawal	13%	--	13%	--	14%	--
Percent Boys who Used Withdrawal	17%	--	17%	--	19%	--

* Differences between older and younger teens are statistically significant ($p \geq 0.05$)

† Differences between racial/ethnic groups are statistically significant ($p \geq 0.05$)

-- Denotes that the sample size was too small for reliable estimates.

Consistency of Contraceptive Use

Any Method

A majority of teens report using contraception both the first time they had sex and the last time they had sex. Al-

most two-thirds of sexually active teen girls (64%) and close to eight in ten sexually active teen boys (78%) used a method of contraception the first time they had sex and the last time they had sex (Figure 8). The proportion of sexually active older and younger teens—both

boys and girls—who used a method at both first and last sex is similar (77% and 80% respectively for boys and 62% and 67% respectively for girls). More than two-thirds of sexually active non-Hispanic white teen girls (72%) used a method of contra-

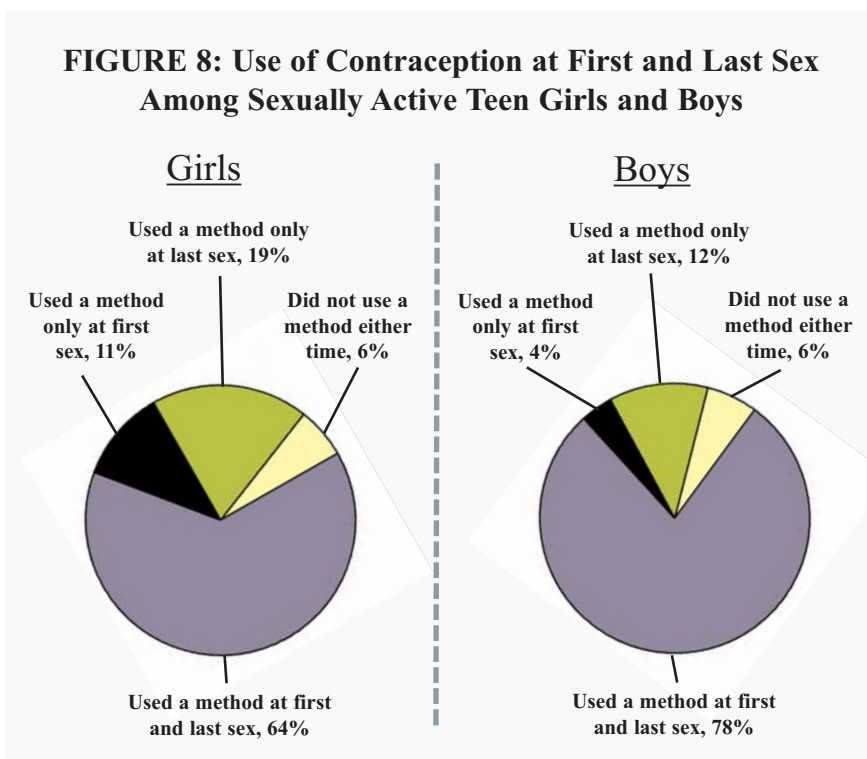
ception the first and last time they had sex compared to more than half of non-Hispanic black teen girls (57%) and about one third of Hispanic teen girls (35%). These differences are statistically significant. Among sexually active boys, 83% of non-Hispanic white teens, 76% of non-Hispanic black teens, and 66% of Hispanic teens used contraception at first and last sex.

Approximately 6% of sexually active girls and boys *did not* use contraception either the first or last time they had sex.

Few teens consistently use dual methods of contraception. Five percent of sexually active teen girls and 7% of sexually active teen boys used dual methods of contraception the first and last times they had sex.

Condoms

Close to one half of never-married teen boys who reported having sex in the past year used a condom every time they had sex (48%).⁷ However, only one-quarter of never-married teen girls who reported having sex in the past year used a



condom every time they had sex (28%).⁸ A majority of never-married teen girls who had sex in the past year used a condom some of the time (55%) and close to one in five did not use a condom at all

during sex in the past year (18%).⁹ Close to half of never-married teen boys who had sex in the past year used a condom some of the time (44%) and less than one in ten did not use a condom at all in the past year (9%).¹⁰

Reasons for Stopping Contraceptive Use (Among Teen Girls who Report Having Ever Stopped Using a Method of Contraception)	
Reason	Percent Who Stopped
Side Effects	53%
Worried about Side Effects	5%
Partner Dissatisfaction	10%
Decreased Sexual Pleasure	11%
Doctor told you not to use the method again	6%
Did not like changes to menstrual cycle	17%
Too expensive	2%
Too difficult to use	2%
Too difficult to obtain	7%
You were worried the method would fail	4%
The method did fail	8%
The method did not protect against disease	3%

Teens Who Stop Using Contraception

Among sexually experienced teen girls who have ever used a method of contraception, close to one third (28%) report that they have at some point in their lives stopped using a method of contraception. Older girls were slightly more likely than younger girls to report that they had ever stopped using a method (31% vs. 25%), and non-Hispanic white teen girls (31%) were more likely than both non-Hispanic black (25%) and Hispanic teen girls (14%) to report that they stopped using a method of contraception. Racial/ethnic differences are statistically significant.

A majority of teen girls who stopped using a method of contraception report that they stopped using the pill (54%), and approximately one quarter report that they stopped using condoms (26%) or Depo-Provera (24%). Almost one in five report that they stopped using withdrawal as a method of contraception (18%).

More than two-thirds of teen girls who stopped using a method of contraception decided to stop using a particular method because of side effects including worry about side effects, partner dissatisfaction, decreased sexual pleasure, doctor advice, and didn't like

changes to menstrual cycle (73%). Approximately one in ten teen girls indicated that they stopped using a method of contraception because it was either too hard to use, or too difficult to obtain (9%). Only 2% of teen girls reported that they could not

afford the method of contraception.

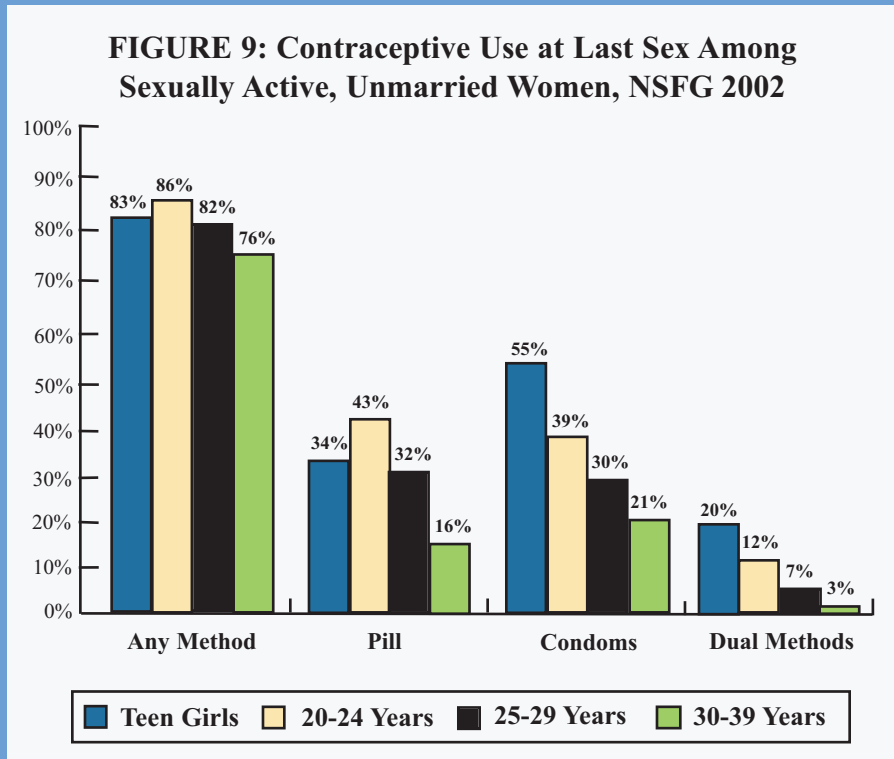
Please note that respondents were able to select more than one method and more than one reason, therefore the numbers noted here do not add to 100 percent.

Comparing Teens with Older Women - Contraceptive Use at Last Sex*

When comparing unmarried, sexually active women, to never-married, sexually active teens, the proportion of teens who used contraception the last time they had sex is similar to the proportion of women in their twenties who used a method of contraception at last sex and is higher than the proportion of women thirty years and older who used contraception at last sex. Specifically, 83% of teen girls used contraception the last time they had sex compared to 86% of women age 20-24 years, 82% of women age 20-29 years, and 76% of women thirty or older.

In addition, teen girls are twice as likely as women in their twenties to report dual use of contraception at last sex—20% compared to 10% of women in their twenties. This difference is statistically significant. Furthermore, significantly more teen girls report using a condom at last sex (55%) compared to women 20-24 years old (39%), women 25-29 years old (30%) and women thirty and older (21%).

**Please note that this section includes only those women who are sexually active and unmarried*



What It All Means

Contraceptive use by teens is getting better but there is much room for improvement. In general, contraceptive use among sexually active teens is increasing, and more teens are using condoms today than ever before. However, important gaps remain. For example:

- More than one quarter of sexually experienced teen girls and nearly one in five sexually experienced teen boys did not use a method of contraception the first time they had sex.

- The proportion is even higher among those teens who started having sex at age 14 or younger—a powerful reason to encourage teens to delay sexual activity.
- Among teens who have had sex in the past year, less than half of teen boys (48%) and only 28% of teen girls report using a condom every time they had sex.

Good and bad news on types of contraception used. On the positive side, there have been impressive increases in dual contraceptive use at last sex among sexually active teens.¹¹ On the other hand, many teens who

say they are “using contraception” are relying on poor methods of protection—55% of teens say they have used withdrawal as a method of contraception.

Gender differences. Despite increases in condom use overall,¹² teen girls are less likely than teen boys to use condoms (at both first and last sex). This may be explained, in part, by teen girls’ relationships with older male partners. Since we only include teen boys in our analysis, we do not capture contraceptive use of these potentially older male partners. Of course, not using condoms puts girls at increased risk for pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STD).

Racial/ethnic differences.

There are some important racial/ethnic differences in teen contraceptive use. As a general matter, Hispanic teens are less likely than teens in other racial/ethnic groups to use contraception. For example, Hispanic teen girls are far less likely than non-Hispanic black and non-Hispanic white teen girls to have ever used the pill or to have ever used a condom, and less than one third of Hispanic teen girls used either condoms or hormonal methods the last time they had sex.

Myths may be a powerful disincentive to use contraception.

Conventional wisdom suggests that teens don't use—or stop using contraception—because it is either too expensive, too hard to use, or too difficult to obtain. While this is undoubtedly true for some teens, it is important to note that a clear majority of teens in these large national surveys say side effects or concerns about side effects are the primary reason why they stopped using contraception. These data suggest that while access to contraception is critically important, so too is teens' perception of—and

reaction to—the side effects of some contraceptive methods.

Finally. Consistent and accurate use of contraception among teens who decide to have sex is critical for reducing the risk of teen pregnancy and STDs. Practitioners, parents, and other caring adults must continue to work with young people to help them choose and use a method of contraception consistently and accurately—every time—whether it be a barrier method or hormonal method—or better yet, both.

About the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization supported largely by private foundations and donations. The National Campaign's mission is to improve the well-being of children, youth, and families by reducing teen pregnancy. The National Campaign's goal is to reduce the teen pregnancy rate by one-third between 2006 and 2015.

About Putting What Works To Work

Putting What Works to Work (PWWTW) is a project of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy funded, in part, by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Through PWWTW, the National Campaign is translating research on teen pregnancy prevention and related issues into user-friendly materials for practitioners, policymakers, and advocates. As part of this initiative, the Science Says series summarizes recent research in short, easy-to-understand briefs.

Author Information

This research brief was written by National Campaign staff member Katherine Suellentrop, and designed by staff member Melissa Spindler-Virgin.

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Data Sources

All statistics for 2002 were generated with data from the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) Cycle 6, a periodic national survey of fertility-related issues conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). NSFG data sets on CD-ROM are available free of charge from NCHS: visit www.cdc.gov/nchs/nsfg.htm, call (301) 458-4222, or e-mail nsfg@cdc.gov for more information.

Female statistics for 1995 and 1988 were generated with data from the NSFG Cycle 5 and Cycle 4 respectively. Refer to the above information for data availability.

Male statistics for 1995 and 1988 were generated with data from the National Survey of Adolescent Males (NSAM), a national survey designed to parallel the NSFG. NSAM was conducted by staff at the Urban Institute, the University of Illinois, and Research Triangle Institute under grants from the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), National Institutes of Health, HHS. NICHD and the Office of Population Affairs, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, HHS provided additional funding to prepare the data sets for release to the public. NSAM data sets are available via Sociometrics Corporation's Data Archive on Adolescent Pregnancy and Pregnancy Prevention (product numbers O7 and P1-P4). For pricing information, visit www.socio.com or call (650) 949-3282.

Endnotes

- ¹ Hamilton, B.E., Ventura, S.J., Martin, J. A., & Sutton, P.D. (2006). Final births for 2004. Health E-Stats. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. Retrieved September 8, 2006 from <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/pubs/pubd/hestats/final-births04/finalbirths04.htm>; The Alan Guttmacher Institute. (2004). U.S. teenage pregnancy statistics: Overall trends, trends by race and ethnicity and state-by-state information. Retrieved February 19, 2004, from www.guttmacher.org/pubs/state_pregnancy_trends.pdf.
- ² Santelli JS, Abma J, Ventura S, et.al. (2004). Can Changes in Sexual Behaviors Among High School Students Explain the Decline in Teen Pregnancy Rates in the 1990s? *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 35 (2): 80-90.
- ³ For boys, being "sexually experienced" is defined as having been married, having cohabited with a female, or having answered yes to the following question: "have you ever had sexual intercourse with a female (sometimes this is called making love, having sex, or going all the way)?" For girls, being "sexually experienced" is defined as having been married, having cohabited with a male, having been pregnant, or having answered yes to the following question: "at any time in your life, have you ever had sexual intercourse with a man, that is, made love, had sex, or gone all the way?" "Virgins" are those who have never married, never cohabited, never been pregnant (girls only), and answered no to the question regarding having had sexual intercourse.
- ⁴ For those unfamiliar with the term "statistical significance," this refers to the results of statistical testing to measure whether observed differences between groups (boys versus girls, older versus younger teens, etc) are true differences in attitudes/behavior, or are due to the particular teens included in the survey, which is meant to be representative of the U.S. teen population. For the purposes of these analyses, the threshold for statistical significance is 0.05. That is, results are considered significant if the "p value" (or probability of the difference being just a random occurrence) is equal to or less than 5%.
- ⁵ Sexually active teens are those that report having had sexual intercourse in the three months before the survey was conducted.
- ⁶ Abma, J.C., Martinez, G.M., Mosher, W.D. (2004). Teenagers in the United States: Sexual Activity, contraceptive use, and childbearing, 2002. *Vital Health Statistics*, 23 (24).
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Franzetta, K., Terry-humen, E., Manlove, J., and Ikramullah, E. (2006). Trends and Recent Estimates: Contraceptive Use Among U.S. Teens. *Child Trends: Washington, DC*.
- ¹² Ibid.