

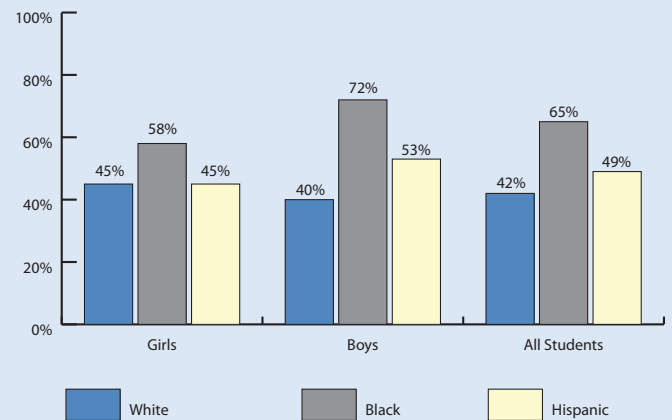
Teen Sexual Behavior and Contraceptive Use: A Summary of Data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2009

Introduction

After declining for more than a decade, rates of teen sex and contraceptive use now seem to be leveling out. According to data from The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBS), a survey of teens in high school, nearly half of teens had ever had sex and roughly two-thirds of sexually active teens used a condom the last time they had sex—proportions that have been relatively unchanged since 2003. It is also the case that the U.S. teen pregnancy rate rose in 2006 (the most recent data available) for the first time since 1990, and the teen birth rate increased between 2005 and 2007—the first increase since 1991—before decreasing slightly in 2008 (the most recent data available).

This *Science Says* research brief provides a summary of the 2009 YRBS data on sexual behavior and contraceptive use among high school students. The information is presented by gender, race/ethnicity, grade level, and by state. Note that national YRBS data reflect students in grades 9-12 in U.S. public and private high schools. Data from 42 states and 20 cities are also available. These data are limited to teens attending high school, and are not representative of *all* teens in the United States. Not all states participate in the YRBS. For more information about the states participating in this survey, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/participation.htm>. Complete state specific results from the survey are available on The National Campaign's website at <http://www.TheNationalCampaign.org/state-data>. Readers should note that all differences referred to in this brief are statistically significant, unless otherwise noted.

FIGURE 1. Proportion of High School Students Who Ever Had Sex by Gender and Race/Ethnicity, YRBS 2009



Teen Sexual Experience

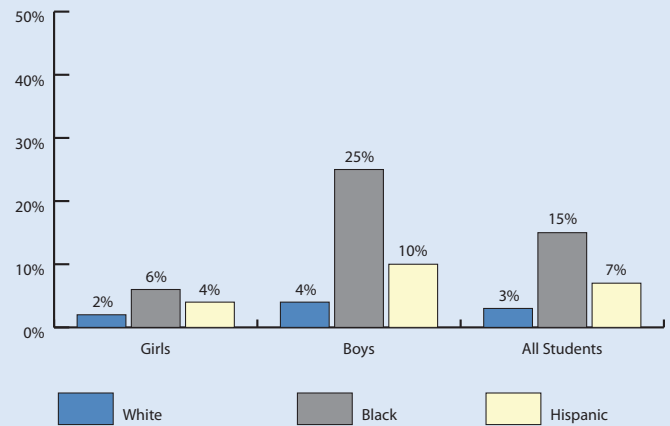
- In 2009, almost half (46%) of high school students—both boys and girls—report that they have had sex at least once. The proportion of high school students who have ever had sex differs by race/ethnicity overall and by race/ethnicity within gender subgroups (Figure 1).
- Overall, non-Hispanic white teens (42%) are less likely than Hispanic (49%) and non-Hispanic black teens (65%) to have ever had sex.

- Non-Hispanic black teen girls (58%) are more likely to be sexually experienced than non-Hispanic white (45%) and Hispanic (45%) teen girls.
- Among high school boys, non-Hispanic black students (72%) are more likely to be sexually experienced than their Hispanic (53%) and non-Hispanic white (40%) peers.
- Not surprisingly, the proportion of high school students who have ever had sex increases with grade level. Nearly one-third (32%) of 9th grade students have ever had sex compared to 41% of 10th grade students, 53% of 11th grade students, and 62% of 12th grade students.
- The proportion of high school students who report ever having had sex also varies slightly by state ranging from approximately 4 in 10 students in Idaho, Colorado, and Connecticut to 6 in 10 students in Mississippi, Delaware, and Alabama.
- Overall, the proportion of teens who report ever having had sex decreased 15% between 1991 and 2009 (from 54% to 46%). However, most of the progress was made between 1991 and 2001 and changes in behavior seem to have stalled since then.
 - Similar to the decline in sexual experience among teens overall, there have been declines in the proportion of teens who are sexually experienced for non-Hispanic white and non-Hispanic black teens, but not among Hispanic teens.
 - The proportion of non-Hispanic white students who have ever had sex decreased from 50% in 1991 to 42% in 2009.
 - The proportion of non-Hispanic black students who have ever had sex decreased from 82% in 1991 to 65% in 2009.
 - There has been no statistically significant change in the proportion of Hispanic students who have ever had sex. In 1991, 53% of Hispanic students were sexually experienced compared to 49% in 2009.

Sex Before Age 13

- Teens who begin having sex at a very young age are more likely to report that the sex was unwanted and are less likely to use contraception than teens who delay sex until they are older. Consequently, teens who initiate sex at a young age are at an increased risk of teen pregnancy.
- In 2009, 6% of high school students said that they had sex for the first time before age 13. Teen boys (8%) are more likely to have had sex before age 13 than teen girls (3%).

FIGURE 2. Proportion of High School Students Who Ever Had Sex Before Age 13 by Gender and Race/Ethnicity, YRBS 2009

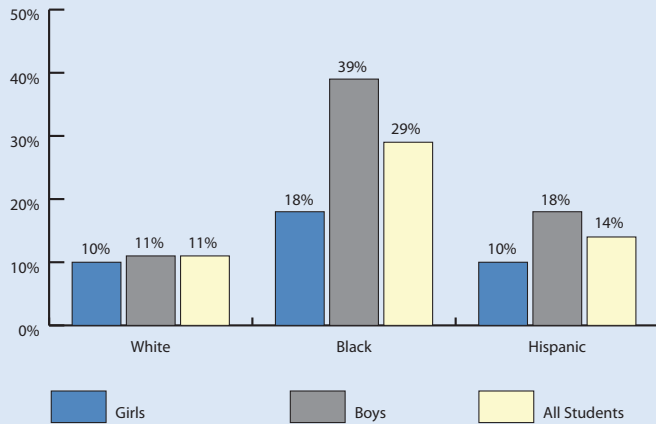


- Non-Hispanic white teens (3%) are less likely than their non-Hispanic black (15%) and Hispanic (7%) peers to have had sex before age 13 (Figure 2).
 - This difference is especially pronounced among teen boys—1 in 4 non-Hispanic black teen boys has had sex before age 13 compared to 1 in 10 Hispanic and 4% of non-Hispanic white teen boys (Figure 2).
 - Among teen girls, the variation by race/ethnicity is not as pronounced but still significant—non-Hispanic black girls (6%) are more likely to have had their first sexual experience before age 13 than non-Hispanic white teen girls (2%). Four percent of Hispanic teen girls reported having had sex before age 13.
- Between 1991 and 2009, the overall proportion of teens who had sex before age 13 declined from 10% to 6%. However, between 2007 and 2009 there was no change in the proportion of teens who had sex before age 13 (7% and 6% respectively).

Sexually Active Teens

- One-third (34%) of high school students are sexually active; that is, they have had sex with at least one person in the three months before the survey. The proportion of sexually active teens is similar by gender—33% of teen boys compared to 36% of teen girls.
- Nearly half (48%) of non-Hispanic black teens report being sexually active compared to a significantly lower proportion of Hispanic teens (35%) and non-Hispanic white teens (32%).
 - A similar pattern is seen within gender—non-Hispanic white teen girls (35%) and Hispanic (34%) teen girls are

FIGURE 3. Proportion of High School Students Who Have Had Four or More Partners by Gender and Race/Ethnicity, YRBS 2009



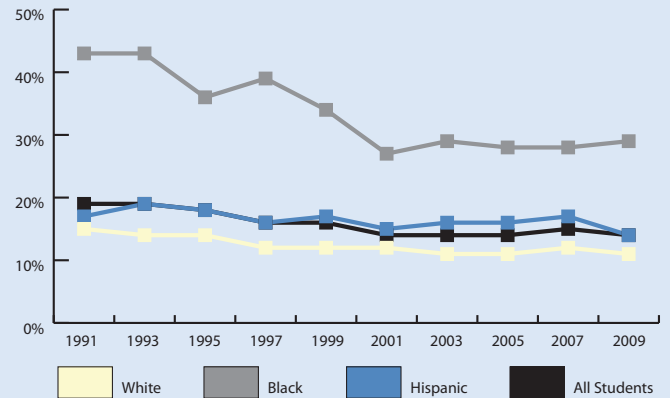
less likely to report being sexually active than non-Hispanic black teen girls (45%). Likewise, non-Hispanic black teen boys (50%) are more likely to report being sexually active than their Hispanic (35%) and non-Hispanic white (29%) peers.

- The proportion of sexually active high school students increases with grade level—21% of students in 9th grade report being sexually active compared to 29% in 10th grade, 40% in 11th grade, and 49% in 12th grade.
- The proportion of teens who are sexually active varies by state, ranging from 27% in Colorado to 45% in Mississippi.
- The overall proportion of sexually active high school students decreased 11% from 1991 to 2009 (from 38% to 34%)—a small but significant change. There was no change in the proportion of sexually active high school students between 2007 and 2009.
 - Between 1991 and 2009, the proportion of sexually active high school students decreased among non-Hispanic black teens (from 59% to 48%) but there was no significant decrease among non-Hispanic white or Hispanic students.

Multiple Partners

- In 2009, 14% of sexually active high school students report having had multiple partners—that is, they report having had sex with four or more partners. Important differences by gender and race/ethnicity are illustrated in Figure 3.
- Overall, teen boys (16%) are more likely to report having had four or more partners than teen girls (11%).

FIGURE 4. Proportion of High School Students Who Have Had Four or More Partners by Race/Ethnicity, YRBS 1991-2009



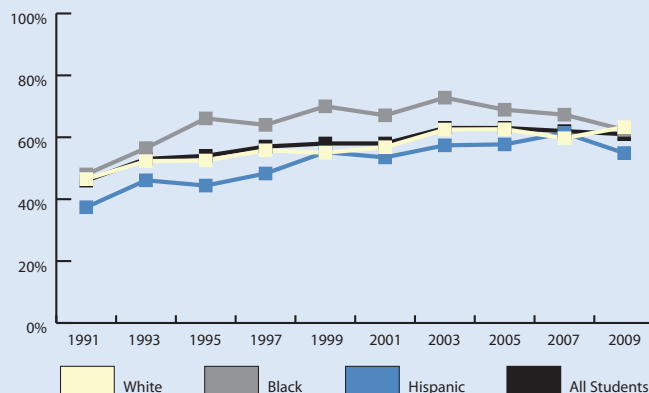
- Non-Hispanic black teens (29%) and Hispanic teens (14%) are more likely than non-Hispanic white teens (11%) to report having had multiple partners (Figure 3).
 - Among non-Hispanic black teens, boys (39%) were more than twice as likely to have had sex with multiple partners compared to girls (18%).
 - Non-Hispanic white teen girls (10%) were just as likely as non-Hispanic white teen boys (11%) to report having had sex with four or more partners.
 - One in 10 Hispanic teen girls has had sex with four or more partners compared to 18% of Hispanic teen boys.
- The proportion of high school students who reported having had four or more partners increased with grade level. Among 9th grade students, 9% have had at least four partners compared to 12% of 10th grade students, 15% of 11th grade students, and 21% of 12th grade students.
- There are small variations by state—the proportion of high school students who have had sex with four or more partners ranged from 1 in 10 in Wisconsin, Connecticut, and Hawaii to 1 in 5 in Mississippi, Delaware, and Alabama.
- Between 1991 and 2009, the overall proportion of high school students who had sex with four or more partners declined from 19% to 14%. Note that this proportion has been approximately 14% since 2001.
 - Among non-Hispanic black students, there has been a particularly significant decline in the proportion of students who have had four or more partners (from 43% in 1991 to 29% in 2009). Similar to the overall trend, the declines seem to have stalled since 2001 (Figure 4).

- Among non-Hispanic white students, there has been a modest decline in the proportion of students who have had four or more partners from 1991 to 2009 (Figure 4).
- There has been no overall change in the proportion of Hispanic students overall who have had sex with four or more partners from 1991 to 2009. However, there was a significant decrease among this group from 2007 to 2009 (Figure 4).

Condom Use

- In 2009, less than two-thirds (61%) of sexually active high school students used a condom the last time they had sex.
- Teen boys (69%) are more likely than teen girls (54%) to report using condoms the last time they had sex.
 - Approximately half of sexually active teen girls report that they used a condom the last time they had sex across all racial/ethnic groups (56% of non-Hispanic white, 52% of non-Hispanic black, and 48% of Hispanic). Note that the difference in condom use between non-Hispanic white teen girls and Hispanic teen girls is statistically significant.
 - Nearly one-third (62%) of sexually active Hispanic teen boys used a condom at last sex compared to 71% of non-Hispanic white and 73% non-Hispanic black teen boys.
- Overall, Hispanic teens (55%) are less likely than non-Hispanic black (62%) and non-Hispanic white (63%) teens to have used a condom the last time they had sex.
- In general, the proportion of students who used a condom the last time they had sex decreases as teens get older. Nearly two-thirds of students in 9th grade used a condom the last time they had sex compared to 68% of 10th grade students, 61% of 11th grade students, and 55% of 12th grade students.
- Condom use among high school students varies by state, ranging from less than half (48%) in Hawaii to fully two-thirds in New York, Montana, and Mississippi.
- Between 1991 and 2009, the proportion of high school students who used a condom the last time they had sex increased from 46% to 61%. The proportion steadily increased between 1991 and 2003 but no real differences have been observed since 2003 (Figure 5).
 - These trends are similar among non-Hispanic white students. Among non-Hispanic black students, there has been a decrease in the proportion who report using a condom the last time they had sex between 2003 and 2009. Among Hispanic students there was an increase

FIGURE 5. Proportion of High School Students Who Used a Condom at Last Sex by Race/Ethnicity, YRBS 1991-2009



in the proportion who report using a condom the last time they had sex between 1991 and 2007, but there was a decrease in condom use between 2007 and 2009.

Birth Control Pill Use

- In 2009, only 1 in 5 sexually active high school students reported that they used birth control pills the last time they had sex.
- Nearly 1 in 4 teen girls (23%) used birth control pills the last time they had sex compared to 17% of teen boys (not statistically significant).
 - Three in 10 non-Hispanic white teen girls used birth control pills the last time they had sex compared to 1 in 10 non-Hispanic black and Hispanic teen girls.
 - Non-Hispanic white teen boys (22%) were more likely to report that their partner used birth control pills the last time they had sex than non-Hispanic black (7%) and Hispanic (12%) teen boys.
- Non-Hispanic white teens (27%) are nearly three times more likely to have used birth control pills the last time they had sex compared to their peers (8% of non-Hispanic black teens and 11% of Hispanic teens).
- The overall proportion of birth control pill use almost triples as teens get older. One in ten 9th grade students used birth control pills the last time they had sex compared to 15% of 10th grade students, 21% of 11th grade students, and 28% of 12th grade students.
- The proportion of sexually active high school students who used birth control pills the last time they had sex ranged from 13% in New Mexico to 34% in Maine.

- The proportion of sexually active high school students who used birth control pills the last time they had sex changed very little between 1991 and 2009.

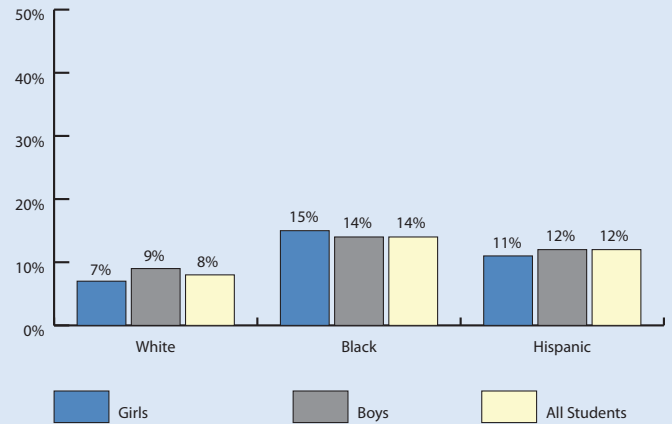
Having Sex Under the Influence

- In 2009, 22% of sexually active high school students report that they drank alcohol or used drugs before the last time they had sex. Boys are more likely than girls to report that they were under the influence the last time they had sex—more than a one-quarter (26%) of teen boys reported being under the influence the last time they had sex compared to 17% of teen girls.
- Non-Hispanic white teens are most likely to report being under the influence the last time they had sex (23%) compared to 19% of Hispanic teens and 18% of non-Hispanic black teens. This overall trend is similar by gender across racial/ethnic groups.
- The proportion of students who report being under the influence the last time they had sex does not vary much by grade level. One-quarter of students in 9th grade report being under the influence the last time they had sex compared to 22% of 10th grade students and 20% of 11th and 12th grade students.
- Among states who participated in the survey, the proportion of teens who reported being under the influence the last time they had sex ranged from 15% in Pennsylvania to 30% in Hawaii.
- The proportion of high school students who were under the influence the last time they had sex increased from 22% in 1991 to 26% 2001 and has subsequently decreased to 22% in 2009.

Dating Violence

- In 2009, 10% of high school students report that they have experienced dating violence recently—that is, they have been hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by their partner during the past 12 months.
- Teen boys (10%) are just as likely as teen girls (9%) to be victims of dating violence.
- The proportion of teens who report experiencing dating violence varies significantly by race/ethnicity, but there are no gender differences within race/ethnicity subgroups (Figure 6).
 - Non-Hispanic white teens (8%) were less likely than non-Hispanic black (14%) and Hispanic teens (12%) to have experienced dating violence.
 - Non-Hispanic black teens were more likely to report having experienced dating violence than their peers.

FIGURE 6. Proportion of High School Students Who Have Experienced Dating Violence by Gender and Race/Ethnicity, YRBS 2009



- There are no differences in reports of dating violence by grade level. Across all grades, about 1 in 10 high school students report having experienced dating violence in the past year.
- The proportion of teens who have experienced dating violence varies considerably by state, ranging from 7% in Oklahoma and Vermont to 18% in Louisiana.
- Between 1999 (the earliest year this was measured) and 2009, the proportion of teens who report having experienced dating violence has remained unchanged (about 9% each year).

What It All Means

Efforts to encourage teens to delay sexual activity and improve contraceptive use need to be re-energized. While great progress was made in the 1990s, new ideas for reaching and connecting with teens to change their behavior are needed to continue to reduce the markedly high rates of teen pregnancy and childbearing in the United States. A few things to consider:

- The data show clear disparities by race/ethnicity. Non-Hispanic black teens are more likely to be sexually experienced and sexually active than their peers. They are also more likely to initiate sex before age 13. However, they are as likely as non-Hispanic white teens to use condoms. Hispanic teens are as likely to be sexually active and sexually experienced as non-Hispanic white teens but they are less likely than their peers to use condoms. These patterns illustrate the complexity of racial/ethnic disparities, and highlight the need to focus on programmatic efforts to reduce these disparities.
- It is also important to note that teen sexual behavior varies among states. Those working on preventing teen pregnancy should look at the state-specific data available from

the YRBS on The National Campaign's website at <http://www.TheNationalCampaign.org/state-data/state-profile.aspx> to better understand the behavior of youth in their state.

- Several studies have found that teens who are involved in other risky behavior, such as substance abuse, also tend to engage in risky sexual behavior. Although these findings remain inconclusive, it is nonetheless important to consider drawing on programs that target non-sexual behavior. Often, youth development programs address multiple behaviors and strive to promote a positive developmental pathway for teens.
- Research suggests that dating violence increases the risk of unwanted sex or may pose obstacles to contraceptive use. Thus, programs focused on reducing dating violence and promoting healthy relationships might also have a positive impact on teen sexual and contraceptive behavior. Furthermore, because similar proportions of teen boys and girls report having experienced dating violence, it is important that interventions include both genders in efforts to address this issue.

These are *some* key points to consider, but are by no means absolute. The recent YRBS data suggest that more needs to be done in order to change teen sexual and contraceptive behavior. Given the constantly changing world of teens and the changing ways in which people—including teens—receive and share information, innovative approaches should also seek to take advantage of the influence of digital media for behavior change. Innovative strategies for reaching and connecting with today's youth are clearly needed to continue to address the extraordinarily high rates of teen pregnancy and childbearing in the United States.

Author Information

This research brief was written by National Campaign Intern, Laetitia Lemoine.

About the Putting What Works to Work Project

Putting What Works to Work (PWWTW) is a project of The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned 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.

About The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization supported largely by private donations. The National Campaign's mission is to

improve the lives and future prospects of children and families and, in particular, to help ensure that children are born into stable, two-parent families who are committed to and ready for the demanding task of raising the next generation. Our specific strategy is to prevent teen pregnancy and unplanned pregnancy among single, young adults. We support a combination of responsible values and behavior by both men and women and responsible policies in both the public and private sectors.

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