



Quick Facts 2019: Sex Education in America

Teen Sexual Behavior

- Among 15-17 year olds, 69% of boys and 72% of girls have never had sexual intercourse.¹
- Between 1991 and 2017 the percentage of high schoolers that never engaged in sexual intercourse increased by 32%.²
- In the past 26 years, the percent of high schooler females who are waiting for sex has increased 27%.³
- In the past 26 years, the percent of high schooler males who are waiting for sex has increased 38%.⁴
- The percent of black teens who have not had sex increased 193%, but the increase for black males was 297% between 1991 and 2017. This signifies the greatest improvement of any other group.⁵
- Since 1991, teen birth rates have declined 67%.⁶
- 89% of all teen births are to unmarried parents.⁷
- The most recent data reports that about 29% of pregnancies among 15-19 year olds end in abortion, down from 46% in 1986.⁸
- Teen abortion rates are at their lowest point since abortion was legalized and just 24% of the peak rate in 1988.⁹
- The likelihood of using contraception increases the longer a teen delays sex, providing an additional reason to promote sexual delay.¹⁰
- More sexually active high schoolers are using long-acting reversible contraception (LARC), but are failing to use a condom as well, in order to offer STD risk reduction.¹¹
- Sexually active high school students were 13% more likely to use a condom in 2007 than in 2017.¹²
- 54% of sexually active high school students used a condom during last intercourse, the only contraception that also reduces the risk of acquiring an STD.¹³

Youth and Sexually Transmitted Disease

- Although nearly all (83%) sexually experienced teen girls have used some form of contraception,¹⁴ STDs continue to be at epidemic levels among youth.
- Young adults (age 15-24) contract about 10 million new STDs each year, costing about \$8 billion in direct medical costs.¹⁵
- About 40% of sexually active teen girls (aged 14-19) have at least one STD.¹⁶
- Half of all new STDs are found among youth, aged 15-24, although they only represent ¼ of the sexually experienced population.¹⁷
- Some of the most common STDs among teen girls are HPV, Chlamydia, trichomoniasis, herpes, and gonorrhea.¹⁸ Herpes and HPV can be easily transmitted even with the use of a condom because they can be spread by skin-to-skin contact.¹⁹
- Young adults (aged 15-24) account for more than half of all reported cases of chlamydia and gonorrhea.²⁰
- Most STDs are present without any symptoms.²¹
- The annual number of new infections is roughly equal among men and young women, but women bear the burden of most of the negative consequences from STDs.²²
- Gonorrhea is considered an urgent threat because it is showing resistance to the last line of antibiotics usually used to treat it.²³
- Although the majority of teens are not sexually active, those who are, are at great risk for contracting or transmitting an STD.

Teens Opinions About Sex

- Teens (ages 12-19) consistently say that parents most influence their decisions about sex.²⁴
- About one half of 18 and 19 year olds wish they had waited longer before becoming sexually active.²⁵
- More than 80% of older teens believe it is possible for a person to choose to stop having sex after having had sex in the past.²⁶
- Although culture is increasingly sexually explicit, the majority of teens are not having sex.²⁷
- More than 80% of 18 and 19 year olds say they don't like the idea of casual sex.²⁸
- About 40% of teens say that their sex ed classes make them feel pressured to have sex. 32% say the feel pressure from their dating partner.²⁹

America's Opinions About Sex

- Most Americans want teens to avoid all the possible consequences of sex, not just teen pregnancy.³⁰
- The majority of American parents, regardless of race or political party, support SRA education with similar enthusiasm, endorsing all the major themes presented in an SRA education class.³¹
- More than 8 of 10 parents, but especially women and African Americans, support the dominant themes of SRA education.³²
- Nearly 9 in 10 parents strongly support the way SRA programs share the medically accurate limitations of condoms for preventing pregnancy and disease.³³

Benefits of Sexual Delay

- Sexual delay and limiting the number of lifetime sexual partners is important to decreasing the risk of pregnancy and STDs.³⁴
- If a male teen initiates sex by 14, he has almost a 75% likelihood of having 6 or more partners by the time he reaches 20 years of age. A teen girl has a 58% likelihood of 6 or more sexual partners by age 20 if she initiates sex by age 14. That risk drops to 10% respectively if the teen waits until he or she is at least 17 years of age.³⁵ Sexual delay until marriage provides the optimal health outcomes, but even a shorter postponement greatly reduces the physical risks of sex.
- Delaying sex until a lifelong, mutually monogamous, commitment (marriage) with an uninfected partner is the only way to avoid all the possible negative physical consequences of sex.

- Delaying sex appears to aid in the permanence of future marriage.³⁶
- Waiting to have children until marriage increases the likelihood of their flourishing.³⁷
- Waiting to have children until marriage decreases the likelihood that both parent and child will live in poverty.³⁸

Sexual Risk Avoidance Education is Effective

- Twenty-five research studies of SRA programs show significant behavioral changes in improving teen outcomes.³⁹
- An additional 43 studies from the Department of Health and Human services (HHS) showed early stage positive attitudinal impacts that tend to predict decreased sexual initiation rates.⁴⁰
- Compared to their peers, students in SRA education programs are more likely to delay sexual initiation; if sexually active, more likely to discontinue or decrease their sexual activity; and no less likely to use a condom if they initiate sex.⁴¹

Sex Education Policy

- 24 states and DC require sex education in the schools.⁴²
- 34 states require HIV/AIDs prevention education in the schools.⁴³
- 37 states permit parents to opt out of sex education classes for their children.⁴⁴
- 3 states require parents to opt in to sex education classes for their children.⁴⁵
- 37 states require sex education to include information about SRA and 18 also require information about contraception. What this education looks like at the local level may vary dramatically.⁴⁶
- 25 states and DC require that sex education include information about skills for avoiding coerced sex.⁴⁷
- 38 states and DC require school districts involve parents in sex education, HIV education or both.⁴⁸
- 20 states require information on condoms and contraception; 27 require abstinence be stressed, and only 12 require that abstinence be covered.⁴⁹

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- 2 CDC (2018). High School YRBS: 2017. Retrieved August 6, 2018 at <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/index.htm>
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- 5 Ibid Two decades ago nearly 9 in 10 black male teens had sex and now the number is slightly more than 5 in 10. While still too high, the improvement translates into more options and opportunities for these teens.
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