

Quick Facts 2024: Sex Education in America

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Keeping up with the latest data and trends regarding teen sexual behavior, sex education policy, and the benefits of sexual delay helps youth access the knowledge and skills they need to make healthy, informed decisions regarding sex, relationships, and future goals.

Teen Sexual Behavior

- Among high school students, 70.7% of boys and 69.4% of girls have never had sexual intercourse.¹
- Between 1991 and 2021 the percentage of high schoolers that never engaged in sexual intercourse increased from 45.9% to 70%.¹
- Between 1991 and 2021, the percent of high school females that have never engaged in sexual intercourse increased from 49.2% to 69.4%.¹
- Between 1991 and 2021, the percent of high school males that have never engaged in sexual intercourse increased from 42.6% to 70.7%.¹
- The percentage of black male teens that have never engaged in sexual intercourse increased from 11.9% to 60.6% between 1991 and 2021.¹ This signifies the greatest improvement by any group.
- Between 1990 and 2022 teen birth rates have declined 78%.^{2,3}
- In 2022, ninety-eight percent and 89% of all teen births, aged 15-17 and 18-19, respectively, were to unmarried parents.²
- From 2012 to 2021, national birth data indicate that the birth rate for adolescents aged 15-19 years decreased 53% and the abortion rate for the same age group decreased 41%. These findings highlight that decreases in adolescent births in the United States have been accompanied by large decreases in adolescent abortions.⁴
- The likelihood of using contraception increases by at least 25% the longer a teen delays sex.⁵

- In 2021, 10% of currently sexually active high school students used dual methods of protection the last time they had sex with an opposite-sex partner.⁶
- Most recent data shows that sexually active high school students were 11% less likely to use a condom in 2021 than in 2003 when the highest use was recorded.⁷
- In 2021, fifty-two percent of sexually active high school students used a condom during last intercourse, the only contraception that also reduces the risk of acquiring an STD.⁷

Youth and Sexually Transmitted Disease

- Although the majority of teens are not sexually active, and the majority of those who are sexually active have used some form of contraception, the prevalence rate of certain STIs is still highest among adolescents and young adults.^{8, 9, 10}
- Sexually active adolescents and young adults (ages 15-24) are at higher risk of acquiring STIs than adults.¹¹
- Teens who initiate sex early in adolescence are at higher risk for STIs.⁹
- While adolescents aged 15-24 account for about 25% of the sexually active population, they accounted for half (50.5%) of all reported STIs annually in 2021.^{11, 12, 13}
- In 2022, half of reported cases of chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis were among adolescents and young adults aged 15-24.^{12, 13, 14, 15, 16}
- Prevalence estimates suggest that one in four sexually active adolescent females has an STI and reported rates of chlamydia and gonorrhea are highest among females during their adolescent and young adults years with many acquiring HPV infection during this time.^{9, 11}
- Most STDs are present without any symptoms.¹⁷
- Women have a higher biological risk of contracting STIs and bear the burden of most of the negative consequences from STDs.¹⁸

Benefits of Sexual Delay

- Sexual delay and limiting the number of lifetime partners is important to decreasing the risk of pregnancy and STDs.¹¹

- The most reliable way to avoid transmission of STDs is to abstain from sexual activity, or to be in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with an uninfected partner.¹⁹
- Delaying sex appears to aid in the permanence of future marriage.^{20, 21}
- Waiting to have children until marriage increases the likelihood of their flourishing.^{22, 23}
- Waiting to have children until marriage decreases the likelihood that both parent and child will live in poverty.^{24, 25, 26}
- Even as premarital sex has become more acceptable and common in modern dating, the lowest divorce rates in the first five years of marriage are found among married couples who have only had sex with each other.²⁷

Sexual Risk Avoidance Education is Effective

- Twenty-five research studies of SRA programs show significant behavioral changes in improving teen outcomes.²⁸
- An additional 46 studies showed early-stage positive attitudinal impacts that tend to predict decreased sexual initiation rates.²⁸
- 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; no less likely to use a condom if they initiate sex, more likely to excel academically, and less likely to engage in other risk behaviors.²⁸

Sex Education Policy

- Thirty-eight states and DC mandate sex education and/or HIV/AIDS education.²⁹
- Twenty-five states and DC require parental notification prior to sex education classes for their children.³⁰
- Thirty-five states and DC permit parents to opt out of sex education classes for their children.³⁰
- Six states require parents to opt in to sex education classes for their children.³⁰
- Thirty-nine states require sex education to include information about abstinence with twenty-nine states requiring that abstinence be stressed.³⁰

- Twenty-one states require information about contraception.³⁰ What this education looks like at the local level may vary dramatically.
- Thirty-eight states and DC require provision of information on preventing, recognizing and responding to teen dating violence and sexual violence.³⁰
- Seventeen states and DC require the inclusion of information on the negative outcomes of teen sex and pregnancy.³⁰
- Thirty-five states and DC require provision of information about skills for healthy romantic and sexual relationships.³⁰

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