



## Quick Facts 2021: Sex Education in America

### Teen Sexual Behavior

- Among 15-17 year olds, 69% of boys and 72% of girls have never had sexual intercourse.<sup>1</sup>
- Among 15-17 year olds, 52.4 % of boys and 60.3% of girls have never had any sexual contact with the opposite sex, which includes sexual activities that are not limited to sexual intercourse.<sup>2</sup>
- Between 1991 and 2017 the percentage of high schoolers that never engaged in sexual intercourse increased by 34%.<sup>3</sup>
- In the past 29 years, the percent of high school females who are waiting for sex has increased 27%.<sup>4</sup>
- In the past 29 years, the percent of high school males who are waiting for sex has increased 43%.<sup>5</sup>
- The percent of black teens who have not had sex increased 212%, but the increase for black males was 319% between 1991 and 2019. This signifies the greatest improvement of any other group.<sup>6</sup>
- Since 1991, teen birth rates have declined 73%.<sup>7</sup>
- 89% of all teen births are to unmarried parents.<sup>8</sup>
- The most recent data reports that about 29% of pregnancies among 15-19 year olds end in abortion, down from 46% in 1986.<sup>9</sup>
- Teen abortion rates are at their lowest point since abortion was legalized and have decreased by 89% since the peak rate in 1988.<sup>10</sup>
- The likelihood of using contraception increases the longer a teen delays sex, providing an additional reason to promote sexual delay.<sup>11</sup>
- 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.<sup>12</sup>
- Sexually active high school students were 12% more likely to use a condom in 2007 than in 2019.<sup>13</sup>
- 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.<sup>14</sup>
- Young adults (age 15-24) contract about half of the 26 million new STDs each year, costing about \$4.16 billion in direct medical costs.<sup>16</sup>
- About 40% of sexually active teen girls (aged 14-19) have at least one STD.<sup>17</sup>
- Over half (55.4%) of all new STDs are found among youth, aged 15-24, although they only represent 1/4 of the sexually experienced population.<sup>18</sup>
- The four most common STDs among teen girls are (in order): HPV, chlamydia, trichomoniasis, herpes, and gonorrhea.<sup>19</sup> Herpes and HPV can be easily transmitted even with the use of a condom because they can be spread by skin-to-skin contact.<sup>20</sup>
- Young adults (15-24) account for more than half of all reported cases of chlamydia and gonorrhea.<sup>21</sup>
- Most STDs are present without any symptoms.<sup>22</sup>
- The annual number of new infections is roughly equal among young men and young women, but women bear the burden of most of the negative consequences from STDs.<sup>23</sup>
- Gonorrhea is considered an urgent threat because it is showing resistance to the last line of antibiotics usually used to treat it.<sup>24</sup>
- Although the majority of teens are not sexually active, those who are, are at great risk for contracting or transmitting an STD.

### Youth and Sexually Transmitted Disease

- Although most sexually experienced teen women (78%) and (89%) of teen men have used some form of contraception,<sup>15</sup> STDs continue to be at epidemic levels among youth.

### Teen Opinions About Sex

- Most adolescents support reserving sex for marriage, both in general and for themselves.<sup>25</sup>
- About one half of 18 and 19 year olds wish they had waited longer before becoming sexually active.<sup>26</sup>
- 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.<sup>27</sup>
- Although culture is increasingly sexually explicit, the majority of teens are not having sex.<sup>28</sup>
- More than 80% of 18 and 19 year olds say they don't like the idea of casual sex.<sup>29</sup>
- About 40% of teens say that their sex ed classes make them feel pressured to have sex. 32% say they feel pressure from their dating partner.<sup>30</sup>

## American's Opinion On Sex Education

- Most Americans want teens to avoid all the possible consequences of sex, not just teen pregnancy.<sup>31</sup>
- The majority of American parents, regardless of race or political party, support Sexual Risk Avoidance (SRA) education with similar enthusiasm, endorsing all the major themes presented in an SRA education class.<sup>32</sup>
- More than 8 of 10 parents, but especially women and African Americans, support the dominant themes of SRA education.<sup>33</sup>
- Nearly 9 in 10 parents strongly support the way SRA programs share the medically accurate limitations of condoms for preventing pregnancy and disease.<sup>34</sup>
- Most parents want their children to wait for marriage before having sex.<sup>35</sup>
- Almost 3/4 of parents are opposed to premarital sex both in general and for their own adolescents.<sup>36</sup>

## Benefits of Sexual Delay

- Sexual delay and limiting the number of lifetime partners is important to decreasing the risk of pregnancy and STDs.<sup>37</sup>
- 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 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.<sup>38</sup> Sexual delay until marriage provides the optimal health outcomes, but even a shorter postponement greatly reduces the physical risks of sex.
- The most reliable way to avoid transmission of STDs is to abstain from oral, vaginal, and anal sex or to be in a long-term, mutually monogamous relationship with a partner known to be uninfected.<sup>39</sup>
- Delaying sex appears to aid in the permanence of future marriage.<sup>40</sup>
- Waiting to have children until marriage increases the likelihood of their flourishing.<sup>41</sup>
- Waiting to have children until marriage decreases the likelihood that both parent and child will live in poverty.<sup>42</sup>

## Sexual Risk Avoidance Education is Effective

- Twenty-five research studies of SRA programs show significant behavioral changes in improving teen outcomes.<sup>43</sup>
- 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.<sup>44</sup>
- 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.<sup>45</sup>

## Sex Education Policy

- 30 states require sex education in the schools.<sup>46</sup>
- 39 states require HIV/AIDS prevention education in the schools.<sup>47</sup>
- 25 states require parental notification prior to sex education classes for their children.<sup>48</sup>
- 36 states permit parents to opt out of sex education classes for their children.<sup>49</sup>
- 5 states require parents to opt in to sex education classes for their children.<sup>50</sup>
- 39 states require sex education to include information about SRA and 20 also require information about contraception.<sup>51</sup> What this education looks like at the local level may vary dramatically.
- 37 states and DC require provision of information on preventing, recognizing and responding to teen dating violence and sexual violence.<sup>52</sup>
- 19 states and DC require the inclusion of information on the negative outcomes of teen sex and pregnancy.<sup>53</sup>
- 35 states and DC require provision of information about skills for healthy romantic and sexual relationships.<sup>54</sup>

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- <sup>2</sup>National Center for Health Statistics. (2011). Sexual behavior, sexual attraction, and sexual identity in the United States: Data from the 2006–2008 National Survey of Family Growth. National Health Statistics Reports. 36 :17, 18
- <sup>3</sup>CDC (2020). High School YRBS: 2019. Retrieved August 26, 2020 at <https://yrbs-explorer.services.cdc.gov/#/>
- <sup>4</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>5</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup>Ibid. Two decades ago nearly 9 in 10 black male teens had sex and now the number is slightly less than 5 in 10. While still too high, the improvement translates into more options and opportunities for these teens.
- <sup>7</sup>Hamilton BE, Rossen L, Lu L, Chong Y. U.S. and state trends on teen births, 1990–2019. National Center for Health Statistics. 2021. Designed by L Lu, BE Hamilton, L Rossen, A Lipphardt, JM Keralis, and Y Chong: National Center for Health Statistics. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data-visualization/teen-births/>
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- <sup>11</sup>Martinez GM, Abma JC. Sexual activity and contraceptive use among teenagers aged 15–19 in the United States, 2015–2017. NCHS Data Brief, no 366. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db366.htm>
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- <sup>13</sup>Ibid. 61.5% of sexually active high school students used a condom during last intercourse in 2007 and only 54.3% did so in 2019.
- <sup>14</sup>Ibid
- <sup>15</sup>Martinez GM, Abma JC. Sexual activity and contraceptive use among teenagers aged 15–19 in the United States, 2015–2017. NCHS Data Brief, no 366. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db366.htm>
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- 62% say that it is against their values to have sex before marriage; 75% believe that having sex would make life difficult; 84% oppose sex at their age; 69% oppose sex while in high school. (p. 61)
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<sup>43</sup>Ascend (2016) SRA Works. Washington DC

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid

<sup>51</sup>Guttman Institute (2021, July 1). Sex and HIV Education. Washington, DC: Accessed July 13, 2021 at <https://www.guttman.org/state-policy/explore/sex-and-hiv-education#>

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