

Child TRENDS[®] FACT SHEET

Publication #2008-31

4301 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 350, Washington, DC 20008
Phone 202-572-6000 Fax 202-362-8420 www.childtrends.org

HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT TEEN SEXUAL BEHAVIOR?

A TRUE-FALSE QUIZ

By Emily Holcombe, B.A., Kristen Peterson, B.A., and Jennifer Manlove, Ph.D.

August 2008

Despite media attention to teen sexual behavior and public concern about its consequences, the public is surprisingly ill-informed or misinformed on the subject. Yet without the facts, it is difficult to develop effective approaches to curb risky sexual behaviors and prevent teen pregnancy and STI transmission.

How well informed are you? To test your knowledge, determine whether each of these statements is true or false.

1. FEWER TEENS ARE HAVING SEX TODAY THAN TEN TO 15 YEARS AGO.

True. The percentage of teens who have ever had sex declined between 1991 and 2007, from 54% to 48%, and the percentage of teens who had sex recently (in the last 3 months) declined from 38% in 1991 to 35% in 2007.³

2. A THIRD OF TEENAGERS HAVE HAD SEX BY AGE 14.

False. In reality, only 6% of females and 8% of males have had sex before age 14.¹ Although few teens have sex at very young ages, most (73%) have sex by age 19.¹

3. GIRLS ARE LESS LIKELY TO HAVE SEX THAN BOYS.

False. Half of teens of both genders have had sex before age 17, and more females than males have had sex by age 19 (70% of females compared to 65% of males).¹ However, this gender similarity is concentrated among white teens. In fact, white teen girls are more likely than white boys to have had sex at all ages. In contrast, black and Hispanic teen girls are less likely than their male counterparts to have had sex.¹

4. VERY FEW TEEN GIRLS FIRST HAVE SEX IN “HOOK UP” RELATIONSHIPS.

True. Most sexually experienced teen girls (78%) were in a steady relationship the first time they had sex.¹ In comparison, only 3% reported that their first sexual partner was someone they had “just met”.^{1,5} The majority of teen boys (73%) also report their first sexual relationship was with a steady partner.⁶

5. MOST TEENS WHO HAVE HAD SEX HAVE ONLY HAD ONE PARTNER.

False. Almost two-thirds of sexually experienced teens aged 15-19 have had multiple sexual partners in their lives. Thirty-one percent of sexually experienced female and 30% of sexually experienced male teens have had 2-3 partners; 17% of female and 21% of male teens have had 4-6 partners; and 13% of sexually experienced females and 16% of males have had 7 or more sexual partners.¹ Thirty-nine percent of females and 34% of males who have had sex report having had only one partner.¹

6. FIRST SEXUAL INTERCOURSE IS NON-VOLUNTARY FOR MOST GIRLS.

False. Ten percent of females who had sex as teenagers report that their first sexual experience was non-voluntary or coercive. Among boys, 6% report that they did not want their first sexual experience to happen at the time. Those who have sex at younger ages are more likely to have had a non-voluntary sexual experience.¹

7. MANY TEENS WHO HAVE HAD SEX REGRET DOING SO.

True. Sixty percent of sexually experienced teenagers wish that they had waited longer. Younger teens are more likely to regret having sex compared with older teens.²

8. TEENS RARELY HAVE SEX WHILE USING ALCOHOL OR DRUGS.

False. Nearly a quarter of teens (23% including 28% of boys and 18% of girls) who had sex recently reported using drugs or drinking alcohol before their most recent sexual experience.³

9. MOST TEENS USE CONDOMS THE FIRST TIME THEY HAVE SEX.

True. Sixty-six percent of teen girls and 71% of teen boys who have ever had sex reported using a condom during their first sexual experience.¹ Condom use among teens increased dramatically throughout the 1990s and early 2000s.^{1,3}

10. MORE TEENS HAVE ENGAGED IN ORAL SEX THAN SEXUAL INTERCOURSE.

True. According to data collected in 2002, 55% of teen females and 54% of teen males report that they have ever had oral sex, compared with 47% of teen females and 46% of teen males who report that they have ever had sexual intercourse.⁴ Among teens that have had sexual intercourse, 88% of males and 83% of females have also had oral sex.

This *Fact Sheet* lists 10 things that parents, the public, policy makers, and practitioners should know about teen sexual behavior. If you got most or all of these questions right: Congratulations! You are well-informed about the sexual behaviors of U.S. teens. If not, we hope that you learned a few important facts.

While all teens who have sex are at risk of pregnancy and STIs, this *Fact Sheet* highlights some of the behaviors that put teens at increased risk: having sexual intercourse at a very young age; with someone whom they just met; with many partners; without a condom; while using drugs or alcohol; and engaging in oral sex.

References

¹ Abma, J. C., Martinez, G. M., Mosher, W. D., & Dawson, B. S. (2004). *Teenagers in the United States: Sexual activity, contraceptive use, and childbearing, 2002*. Vital Health Statistics 23(24). Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.

² Albert, B. (2007). *With one voice: America's adults and teens sound off about teen pregnancy*. Washington, D.C.: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2008). *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance - United States, 2007*. Atlanta, GA.

⁴ Child Trends. (2005). *Child Trends Databank: Oral Sex*. Washington, DC: Child Trends: <http://www.childtrends.databank.org/indicators/95OralSex.cfm>.

⁵ Child Trends. (2008). *Child Trends' analyses of the National Survey of Family Growth, 2002*. Washington, DC.

⁶ Martinez, G., Chandra, A., Abma, J., Jones, J., & Mosher, W. D. (2006). Fertility, contraception, and fatherhood: Data on men and women from Cycle 6 of the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth. *Vital and Health Statistics, Series 23(26)*.

Support for this *Fact Sheet* comes from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

Child Trends is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center that studies children at every stage of development. Its mission is to improve outcomes for children by providing research, data, and analysis to the people and institutions whose decisions and actions affect children. For additional information on Child Trends, including a complete set of available Research Briefs, visit our Web site at www.childtrends.org. For the latest information on more than 100 key indicators of child and youth well-being, visit the Child Trends DataBank at www.childtrends.databank.org. For summaries of over 300 experimental evaluations of social interventions for children, visit www.childtrends.org/LINKS.