

Some Facts on Teenage Sexual Behavior

How many teens become pregnant each year?

About 840,000 teens become pregnant each year. One-third of these end in abortion. Over 3 out of 4 teen births are out-of-wedlock. The good news is that the numbers have been decreasing.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National and State-Specific Pregnancy Rates Among Adolescents -- United States, 1995-1997. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep.* 2000;49(27): 605-611.

What is the impact of nonmarital teenage pregnancy?

According to the Robin Hood report *Kids Having Kids*:

- Seven out of 10 adolescent mothers drop out of high school.
- The long-term wage earning power of adolescent fathers is greatly reduced.
- The teenage sons of adolescent mothers are 2.7 times more likely to spend time in prison than the sons of mothers who delay childbearing until their early 20s.
- The teenage daughters of adolescent mothers are 50 percent more likely to bear children out of wedlock.
- More than 80 percent of single mothers under 18 years of age end up in poverty and reliant on welfare assistance.

Source: Maynard, R.A. (ed.). (1996). *Kids Having Kids: A Robin Hood Foundation Special Report on the Costs of Adolescent Childbearing*. New York: Robin Hood Foundation.

What is the average age of those who father teenage nonmarital births?

Men past school-age father two thirds of the children born to school-age mothers. These men average 4.2 years older than the senior-high mothers and 6.7 years older than the junior-high mothers.

Source: Males M, Chew KS. The ages of fathers in California adolescent births, 1993. *Am J Public Health.* 1996;86(4):565-568.

How bad is the sexually transmitted disease epidemic, really?

STDs accounted for 87 percent of all cases among the top ten most frequently reported infections in the U.S. during 1997. Five of the top 10 reportable infectious disease in 1997 were either exclusively or largely transmitted during sex, including the top four (chlamydia, gonorrhea, AIDS and syphilis).

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Summary of Notifiable Disease, United States 1998. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep.* 1999;47(53):1-93.

Aren't we dealing with the same STDs as those in the 60s and 70s?

No. In the 60s only syphilis and gonorrhea were common. Today there are at least 25 STDs, and at least eight new pathogens have been identified since 1980, including HIV.

Source: Eng TR, Butler WT, eds. *The Hidden Epidemic - Confronting Sexually Transmitted Disease*. Institute of Medicine. Washington, DC: National Academy Press; 1997.

How many people are infected with an STD?

It is estimated that there are more than 68 million current STD infections among Americans. Each year, 15.3 million new STD infections occur, including over 3 million infections in teens. The two most common STDs, herpes and human papilloma virus (HPV), account for 65 of the 68 million current infections.

Source: American Social Health Association. *Sexually Transmitted Disease in America: How Many Cases and at What Cost?* Menlo Park, Calif.: Kaiser Family Foundation; 1998.

It is estimated that 20 percent of all Americans age 12 and older are infected with genital herpes.

Source: Fleming, D, et al. Herpes Simplex Virus Type 2 in the United States, 1976-1994. *N Engl J Med.* 1997;337(16): 1105-1111.

What age group is at greatest risk for acquiring an STD?

Adolescents and young adults (15-24) are the age groups at the greatest risk for acquiring an STD. Approximately two-thirds of all people who acquire STDs are under 25. The Centers for Disease Control states that adolescents and young adults are at greater risk for many reasons, including:

- They may have less immunity than adults
- They may be more likely to have multiple sex partners
- They may be more likely to engage in unprotected intercourse
- They may select partners at higher risk
- Age at initiation of sexual activity has decreased while age at first marriage has increased, resulting in more nonmarital sexual experience

Source: Division of STD Prevention. *Sexually Transmitted Disease Surveillance 1999*. Department of Health and Human Services, Atlanta: Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), September 2000. Eng TR, Butler WT, eds. *The Hidden Epidemic - Confronting Sexually Transmitted Disease*. The Institute of Medicine. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1997.

What about HIV?

An estimated 25% of new HIV infections are found in people under age 22. An estimated 50% of all new HIV infections occur among people under 25, with the majority being infected sexually. HIV has already taken the lives of more than 375,000 Americans. By the way of comparison, America lost approximately 400,000 people in World War II.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *HIV Prevention Strategic Plan Through 2005*. September 2000.

What are some results of teens' increased susceptibility to STDs?

Compared to older women, teen girls have a higher rate of chlamydia, a disease that is a common cause of pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), which can lead to infertility. At least 10 percent of all sexually active teens are infected with this disease. Among women, gonorrhea rates are highest among teen girls ages¹⁵⁻¹⁹.

Source: Division of STD Prevention. *Sexually Transmitted Disease Surveillance 1999*. Department of Health and Human Services, Atlanta: Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), September 2000.

The risk of pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) is as much as 10 times greater for 15-year-old females than for 24-year-old females. PID can cause sterility.

Source: Westrom L. Incidence, Prevalence, and Trends of Acute Pelvic Inflammatory Disease and Its Consequences in Industrialized Countries. *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*. 1980: 138, 880-92.

What is HPV?

Human papilloma virus (HPV) is an STD that causes genital warts. It also is the cause of more than 90 percent of all cervical cancer. Cervical cancer takes the lives of about 5,000 American women yearly, and condoms provide almost no protection against HPV. It is estimated 5.5 million new infections occur each year with at least 20 million people currently infected.

Source: National Institutes of Health. (April 1-3, 1996). *Cervical Cancer: NIH Consensus Development Statement*, Online, 43(1), 1-30.

Source: American Social Health Association. (1998, December) *Sexually Transmitted Disease in America: How Many Cases and at What Cost?* Menlo Park, Calif.: Kaiser Family Foundati

Is medical care the answer to STDs?

While medical science has made great advances, the STD epidemic continues to grow. Chlamydia and gonorrhea can be "cured" with antibiotics, but can leave scars, which often require future treatment and may cause infertility. And certain strains of gonorrhea are becoming increasingly resistant to antibiotics. Viral STDs pose a major problem, because no medical cure has been found for any virus-not even the common cold. This means if a person becomes infected with a viral STD (such as herpes, HPV or HIV) there is no cure. A vaccine for herpes has been rumored for years, but has not yet been produced.

Antiviral drugs reduce the number of outbreaks a person with herpes experiences, they cannot eliminate the outbreaks entirely. A cure, or vaccine, for the HIV virus is probably years away. We do know, however, that even if vaccines or cures for these infections were available today-the STD problem would not be solved.

What is the solution to the twin epidemics of sexually transmitted disease and nonmarital pregnancy?

Postponing sexual activity until marriage with an uninfected mate is the only way for teens and single adults to be 100 percent confident of avoiding STD infection and nonmarital pregnancy. Most adolescents can postpone sexual activity (become or remain abstinent) if properly instructed and encouraged. Delaying sex until marriage is the only advice supported by medical research that offers adequate protection from STDs and nonmarital pregnancy.

What is true abstinence?

True abstinence includes avoiding genital contact until marriage. Some have proposed mutual masturbation and “outercourse” as healthy and safe alternatives for single people. These activities are not consistent with the abstinent lifestyle. Sexual activity, such as these, can not only result in both pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease, but can also lead to sexual intercourse.

Is abstinence realistic?

More than 50 percent of high school students have not had sex. And recent studies show this number is increasing. Of teens who are sexually experienced-have had intercourse at least one time-approximately 25 percent are currently abstinent (which means they’ve had no sexual involvement within the prior three months).

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (1998). Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance-United States, 1997. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 47(SS-3).

What is secondary virginity?

Secondary virginity is possible for teens who have been sexually active and who may want to stop being sexually active and wait until later-perhaps even until marriage-to initiate sex again. Secondary virginity is becoming more and more common among young adults. In view of the sexually charged society that teenagers live in, it seems appropriate for parents, educators and society as a whole to design strategies that encourage all single people who are sexually active to become abstinent.

Is it normal and healthy not to have sex until marriage?

Yes, in fact it is the best way to stay physically and emotionally healthy. Some have heard the old saying, “We use it or lose it,” and have believed it about sexual ability. It is not true. An individual may be abstinent from sex from birth until marriage, or following divorce or the death of a spouse, and then enjoy a wonderful normal sex life in a future marriage.

Can parents make a difference in whether a teen becomes sexually active?

Definitely. Studies show that parents can have the most dramatic impact on their children’s behavior if they clearly define what they expect their children to do (and not do) within the context of close family connectedness. According to the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health, parental disapproval of their teen being sexually active and of their teen using contraceptives are significant factors that influence the delay of the onset of sexual activity in teenagers.

Source: Resnick, M.D. et al. (1997, September). Protecting Adolescents from Harm-Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 278(10), 823-832.

What are the costs of STDs?

Every year about \$17 million is spent on the treatment of major STDs and their preventable complications Source: Institute of Medicine. (1997). *The Hidden Epidemic—Confronting Sexually Transmitted Disease* (edited by Thomas R. Eng and William T. Butler). Washington,

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