

Reproductive Health Outcomes & Contraceptive Use among U.S. Teens

Many U.S. teens do not use contraception and condoms consistently. As a result, each year many teens experience pregnancy, mostly unintended. Yet about half of *all* pregnancies among U.S. women each year are unintended. In fact, teens' use of contraception and condoms mirrors that of adult women and men.

Pregnancy Rates in the United States Have Declined But Remain High

- In 2004, teens accounted for about 11 percent of all the pregnancies among U.S. women, about 10 percent of the births, and just under 7 percent of the abortions.^{1,2,3}
- In the United States in 2004, there were 72.2 pregnancies per 1,000 women ages 15 through 19, including 1.6 per 1,000 teens under age 15; 41.5 per 1,000 teens ages 15 through 17; and 118.6 per 1,000 teens ages 18 and 19.¹
- Pregnancy rates in 2004 were higher among adult women than among teens. For example, there were 164 pregnancies per 1,000 women ages 20 through 24; 169 per 1,000 women ages 25 through 29; and 135 per 1,000 women ages 30 through 34.¹
- Between 1990 and 2004, U.S. adolescent pregnancy rates declined 38 percent among 15- to 19-year-old women; 53 percent among youth under age 15; 46 percent among 15- to 17-year-olds; and 30 percent among 18- to 19-year-olds.¹
- Teen pregnancy rates dropped in three major ethnic groups in 2004; yet pregnancy rates remained higher for black and Hispanic teens than for whites. Among teens ages 15 through 19, the pregnancy rate was 45 per 1,000 non-Hispanic whites; 128 per 1,000 non-Hispanic blacks; and 133 per 1,000 Hispanics.¹

U.S. Birth Rates Rise

- In 2006, American women gave birth to 4,265,996 infants, the largest number of births since 1961. Women ages 15 through 19 had about 10 percent (435,427) of the births, while women in their 20s had about 53 percent of the infants.²
- Birth rates for U.S. teens ages 15 through 19 rose three percent, from 40.5 in 2005 to 41.9 per 1,000 in 2006, the first increase reported since 1991. At the same time, birth rates also rose among all age groups of adult women.²
- Among U.S. teens ages 15 through 19, the birth rate was lowest among Asian and Pacific Islanders at 17 per 1,000. The birth rates were: 27 per 1,000 non-Hispanic whites; 55 per 1,000 American Indian/Alaska natives; 64 per 1,000 non-Hispanic blacks; and 83 per 1,000 Hispanics.²

Fewer Young Women Seek Abortions

- Pregnancies among women ages 15 through 19 are more than twice as likely to end in live birth as in abortion.¹
- The proportion of abortions obtained by women younger than 20 has dropped steadily since 1974. In that year women younger than 20 accounted for 33 percent of all abortions; in 1989, 25 percent, and in 2004, only 17 percent.³
- The number of abortions in the United States declined by 24 percent between 1990 and 2004, down from 1.61 million to 1.22 million. In 2004, the abortion rate was 19.7 per 1,000 women ages 15 through 44,^{2,4} and 19.8 per 1,000 women ages 15 through 19.^{4,5}
- In 2004, the abortion rate was 11 per 1,000 non-Hispanic whites ages 15 through 19, down from 33 per 1,000 in 1990. Among Hispanic teens, the rate in 2004 was 27, down from 39 in 1990. For non-Hispanic black teens, the 2004 rate was 47, down from 84 in 1990.¹
- Between 1990 and 2004, the abortion rate fell by two-thirds among non-Hispanic white teens, by almost a third among Hispanic teens, and by 44 percent among non-Hispanic black teens.¹

Young People Experience the Greatest Proportion of Unintended Pregnancies

- While about half of *all* pregnancies in the United States are unintended, rates of unintended pregnancy are highest among women ages 18 and 19 and 20 through 24.⁶
- The *proportion* of unintended pregnancies remains highest among women under age 20. In other words, about 85 percent of teenage pregnancies are unintended compared to about 50 percent among adult women.⁶
- Unintended pregnancy rates are about four times higher among women whose income is at or below the federal poverty line (112 per 1,000 women) than among women whose income is at least twice the federal poverty level (29 per 1,000).⁶

Contraceptive Use and Inconsistent Use Are Problematic Among American Women

- Half of all unintended pregnancies occur among contraceptive users; 90 percent result from inconsistent or incorrect method use.⁷
- By comparison, half of all unintended pregnancies occur among the relatively small percentage of women who use **no** contraception. For example, half of all unintended pregnancies among sexually active high school students occurs among the 88 percent who use contraception (even if inconsistently or incorrectly) and half occurs among the 12 percent who report using no method.^{8,9}
- Studies show that women with ambivalent attitudes toward pregnancy use contraceptives less consistently and less effectively than women who have clear, firm motivation to avoid pregnancy.⁸
- In 2003, among sexually active high school students who reported using contraception: 14 percent used oral contraceptives; 49 percent used condoms only; six percent used both oral contraceptives and condoms; 11 percent relied on withdrawal; three percent on injected contraception; two percent on both condoms and injected contraception; two percent used an undefined method; and less than half of one percent used an undefined method and condoms. *Twelve* percent used *no* method.⁹
- Research shows that males who reported engaging with their partner in more couple-like activities were more likely to have ever used and always used contraception as were females who had discussed contraception before sex.¹⁰
- Research suggests that many teens make decisions about whether to use contraception and/or condoms *within the context* of each sexual relationship. While some studies indicate *more* consistent use in casual relationships than in regular or main relationships, other studies indicate that, the less familiar adolescents felt with a prospective partner, the less likely they were to use contraception, possibly because they felt less comfortable discussing sex, sexual histories, and contraception.¹⁰
- Research also shows that male teens who did not use contraception during a first sexual relationship were 66 percent less likely to have used contraception in their latest relationship compared to males who used contraception at first sex.⁹ Males who suffered sexual abuse in the past were far less likely to use contraception than males who never suffered such abuse.⁸
- Female teens who did not use contraception during a first sexual relationship were less likely to have used it in their latest relationship. Females were also unlikely to use contraception if their partner was initially a stranger to them. And, females' likelihood of using contraception was reduced by 20 percent for each additional partner they had ever had.¹⁰

References

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