

HIV-Related Risk among U.S. High School Students

Trends from the National Youth Risk Behavior Survey since 1991

In a 20-year analysis of HIV-related risk behavior among U.S. high school students, researchers from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention examined trends overall and by race/ethnicity.¹ The study found that risk behaviors have declined dramatically among African American students, significantly reducing disparities in risk between black youth and youth of other races/ethnicities. While declines in most of the risk behaviors among black youth generally persisted over the entire study period — covering 1991–2011 — progress among students overall was significant only through the early 2000s, and has stalled since that time. Additionally, despite the significant progress, black youth still report higher levels of risk behavior than youth of other racial or ethnic groups, with the notable exception of reporting higher levels of condom use.

The data come from CDC’s National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), a nationally representative biennial survey of public and private school students in grades 9–12. Since 1991, YRBS has monitored a wide range of health risk behaviors among high school students on the national, state, and local levels, including behaviors that put young people at risk for HIV and other STDs.

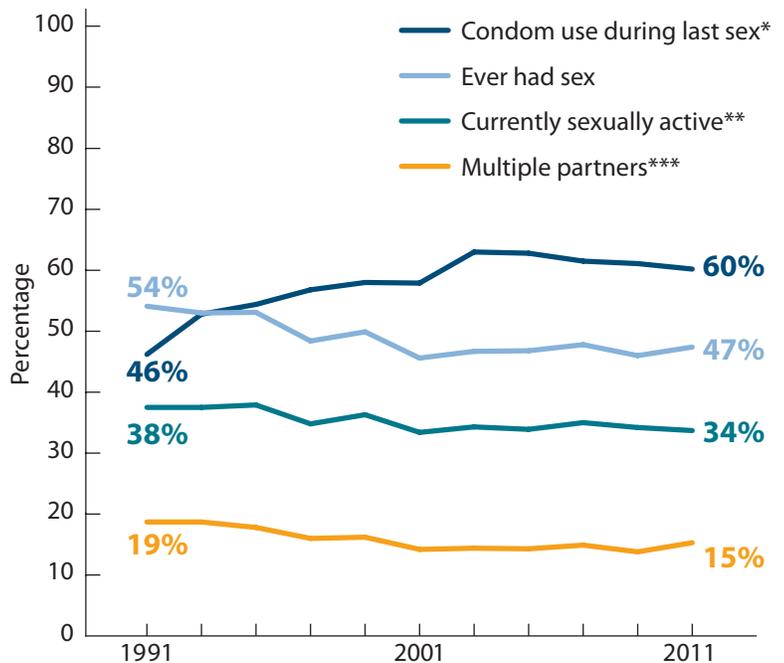
Reducing sexual and other risk behaviors among young people is critical to stopping the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in the United States. Young people under the age of 30 represent approximately four out of every 10 new HIV infections, and those under 25 account for approximately half of the 19 million STDs that occur each year in this country.

¹ Researchers calculated trends for black, Hispanic, and white students. The numbers of students from other racial/ethnic groups were too small for meaningful analyses.

Snapshot: Overall Declines in Sexual Risk Behavior

Sexual risk behaviors declined among high school students overall through the early 2000s, but progress has since stalled:

- The proportion of U.S. high school students who had ever had sex declined from 1991 (54 percent) to 2001 (46 percent) and has stabilized since that time (47 percent in 2011).
- The proportion of students who had sex within the preceding three months declined from 38 percent in 1991 to 34 percent in 2011.
- The proportion of students who had multiple (four or more) sex partners decreased from 1991 (19 percent) to 2001 (14 percent) and has stabilized since that time (15 percent in 2011).
- The proportion of sexually active students who used a condom the last time they had sex increased from 1991 (46 percent) to 2003 (63 percent) and has stabilized since that time (60 percent in 2011).



* Among currently sexually active students

** Sexual intercourse during the past 3 months

*** Four or more lifetime sex partners

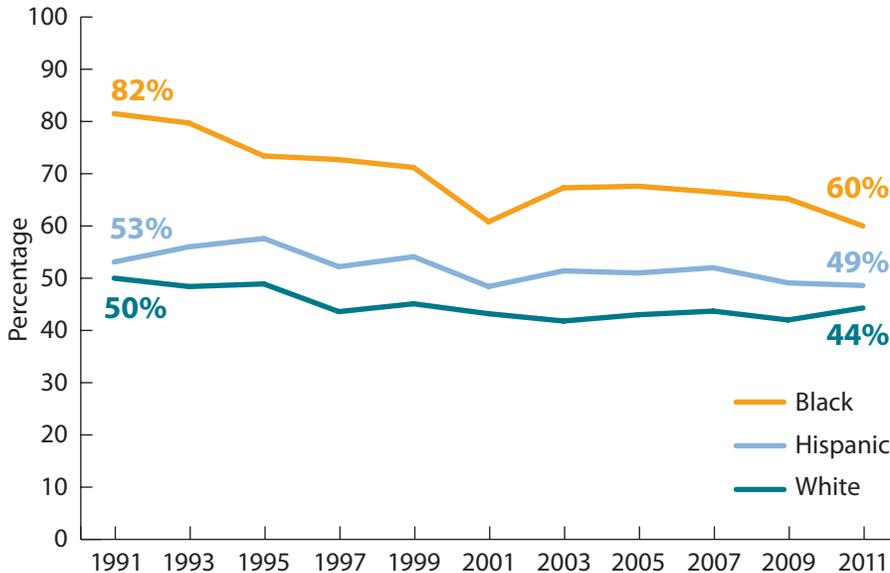


Snapshot: Racial Disparities in HIV-Related Risk Behaviors

Due to significant declines in sexual risk behaviors among black students, the gap in risk behavior between black and white students has narrowed considerably since 1991. Among Hispanic students, there has been no significant change during the last two decades in the percentage of students reporting sexual experience, multiple partners, or current sexual activity.

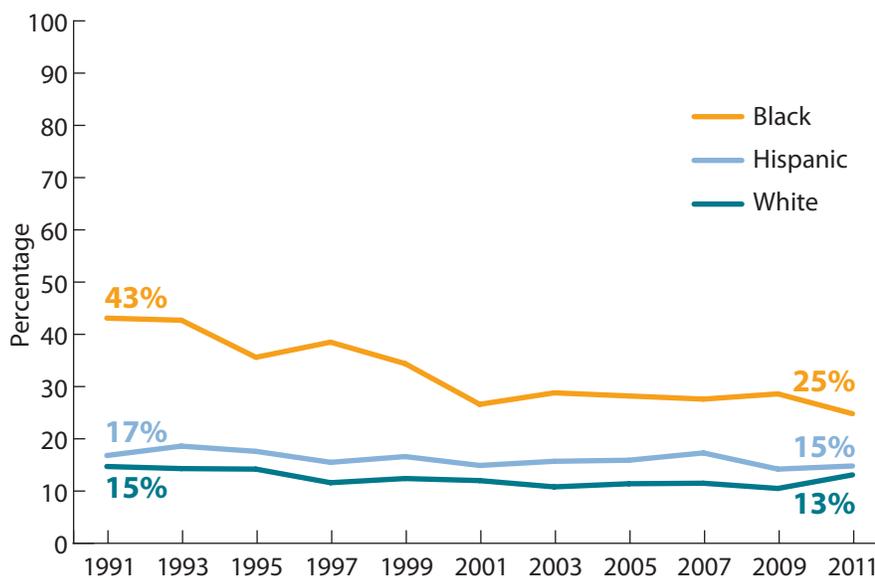
The YRBS does not measure some of the known social and economic determinants of risk behavior, such as family income and education, so researchers cannot assess the degree to which these factors may account for the higher levels of risk behavior among African American youth in this study.

Percentage of High School Students Who Have Ever Had Sexual Intercourse, by Race/Ethnicity, 1991–2011



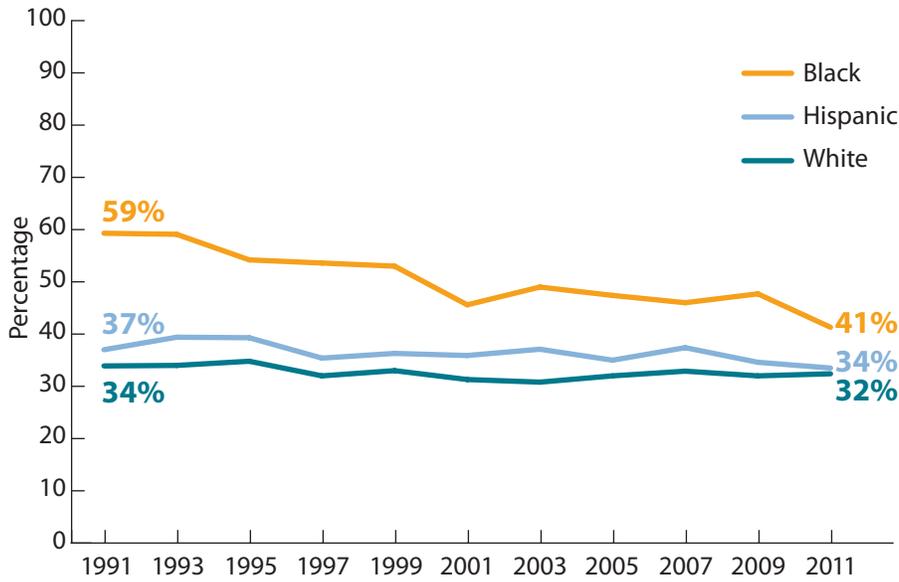
By race/ethnicity, the proportion of U.S. high school students who had ever had sexual intercourse significantly declined among black students (from 82 to 60 percent); remained stable among Hispanic students (from 53 to 49 percent); and, after an initial decline, has stabilized since 2003 among white students (50 percent in 1991, 42 percent in 2003, 44 percent in 2011).

Percentage of High School Students Who Have Had Four or More Lifetime Sex Partners, by Race/Ethnicity, 1991–2011



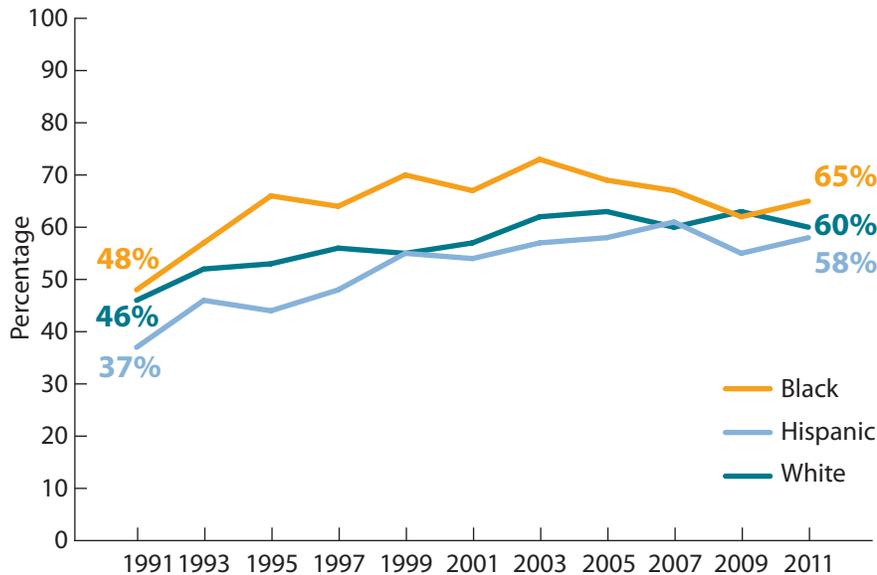
From 1991 to 2011, the percentage of students who reported having had four or more lifetime sex partners declined among black students (from 43 to 25 percent); remained stable among Hispanic students (17 to 15 percent); and after an initial decline among white students (15 percent in 1991 to 11 percent in 2003), has stabilized since that time (13 percent in 2011).

Percentage of High School Students Who Had Sexual Intercourse During the Past Three Months, by Race/Ethnicity, 1991–2011



From 1991 to 2011, the proportion of students who reported being currently sexually active declined from 59 to 41 percent among black students; and remained stable among Hispanic students (37 to 34 percent) and white students (34 to 32 percent).

Percentage of Currently Sexually Active High School Students Who Used a Condom During Last Sexual Intercourse, by Race/Ethnicity, 1991–2011



Black students generally report significantly higher levels of condom use during last sexual intercourse than their white or Hispanic peers. However, although condom use among black youth increased from 1991 (48 percent) to 1999 (70 percent), it has declined since that time (65 percent in 2011). After initial increases, condom use stabilized among Hispanic and white youth (among Hispanic youth, from 37 percent in 1991 to 61 percent in 2007 and 58 percent in 2011; among white youth, from 46 percent in 1991 to 62 percent in 2003 and 60 percent in 2011).

Working to Protect the Health of Our Youth

CDC is committed to protecting young people from HIV and other STDs and is currently working with partners on a number of fronts to address this critical need. Efforts to reach this population include:

- Providing a range of data and support for effective school-based HIV and STD prevention efforts, including: collecting and analyzing data like these on HIV-related risk behaviors and school-based health policies and practices to help schools and communities understand risks and tailor prevention efforts to meet local needs; funding HIV and STD education coordinators in state and local education agencies to help schools implement effective HIV prevention efforts; and providing evidence-based tools to help schools develop and evaluate programs and policies.
- Partnering with MTV and the Kaiser Family Foundation on the *Get Yourself Tested* campaign, which reaches young people with messages about testing for HIV and other STDs through traditional and social media, and working to explore other forms of new media, such as motion comics to deliver HIV prevention messages.
- Funding community-based organizations throughout the United States to reach young gay and bisexual men — who account for the vast majority of new HIV infections among youth — with testing and other critical prevention services.
- Working to develop, adapt, and evaluate new HIV prevention programs for young people at high risk, including programs to reach young African-American girls, Hispanic youth and their parents, and young African-American gay and bisexual men.

Protecting the health of young people and accelerating progress in HIV prevention in this population will require building upon these and other efforts in homes, schools, and communities across the nation. In order to effectively combat disparities, it will be critical to address not only individual risk factors, but also the socio-economic factors that influence risk behaviors. Only by intensifying our collective efforts will we be able to achieve our shared goal of an AIDS-free generation.

Sources

CDC. Trends in HIV-related risk behaviors among high school students – United States, 1991-2011. *MMWR* 2012 July 24.

Kann L, Lowry R, Eaton D, et al. Unequal progress: Differences in HIV-related risk behavior trends among subgroups of U.S. adolescents. XIX International AIDS Conference. July 22-27, 2012. Washington, D.C. Abstract TUPE245.