

**Teenagers in the United States:  
Sexual Activity, Contraceptive Use, and Childbearing, 2002  
A Fact Sheet for Series 23, Number 24**

**Objective of the report**—To present national estimates of sexual activity, contraceptive use, and births among males and females 15-19 years of age. To describe trends among teenagers between 1988, 1995 and 2002.

**Source of data**---The 1988, 1995, and 2002 National Surveys of Family Growth (NSFG), and the 1988 and 1995 National Survey of Adolescent Males (NSAM).

**Methods**---In-person interviews using laptop computers. Among the total sample of males and females 15-44 were 1,150 females and 1,121 males aged 15-19.

**Response rate** for teenagers was 81 percent.

- Teens in 2002 are delaying sex until older ages compared to 1995.
- Teens are also using contraception more often, compared to 1995 data.
  - Among younger female teens (aged 15-17) , the percent who ever had sex declined from 38 in 1995 to 30 in 2002.
  - Among male teens, the percent who ever had sex declined from 55 in 1995 to 46 in 2002.
  - Among teens who had sex in last 3 months, a higher percentage used contraception than was true in 1995 (in 2002, 83% of females used contraception at last sex and 91% of males did so)
  - Increases occurred in the use of several different methods, including: the pill, the condom, injectables, and dual methods (condom combined with a hormonal method).
- Other facts about sexual activity among teens:
  - Just under half of teens have had sex: In 2002, 47 percent, or 4.6 million, female teens had had sex and 46 percent, or 4.7 million, male teens had had sex.
  - Sex among the youngest teens has declined as well: in 2002, 13 percent of never-married female teens had had sex before age 15 (compared to 19 percent in 1995), and 15 percent of males had done so (compared to 21 percent in 1995).
  - The vast majority of (never-married) teenagers had not had intercourse in the month prior to interview (72 percent of females and three-fourths of

males), but 16 percent of females and 12 percent of males had had sex 4 or more times in the past month.

- First intercourse was nonvoluntary for 10 percent of teen females
- For the majority of female teens the first sex partners are commonly 1 to 3 years older than themselves, but for a quarter of the teens, the first partners were 4 or more years older.
- During the year preceding the survey, 18 percent of male teens and 14 percent of female teens had had 2 or more sexual partners.
- Other facts about contraceptive use among teens:
  - The use of contraception at first intercourse has increased: Males and females whose first intercourse occurred in the mid-nineties through 2002 are much more likely to use contraception at first intercourse than those whose first sex was before 1990.
  - In 2002, about three-fourths of teen females and 82 percent of teen males used a method of contraception at first intercourse.
  - The most popular method at first intercourse was the condom, with 66 percent of females and 71 percent of males using this method at first intercourse.
  - Among female teens, contraceptive use at first sex is more likely for those who are older at first sex.
  - The percent of teens who have ever used the injectable method of contraception is about one in five.
- Differences in contraceptive use by race and Hispanic origin:
  - Increases in the use of any contraceptive method at last sex have occurred among white female teens more so than for black female teens, and disparities remain:
    - One quarter of non-Hispanic black female teens were unprotected at last sex, compared with 10 percent of non-Hispanic white females.
  - Among non-Hispanic black female and male teens there have been increases in condom use at last sex, with the largest increases for non-Hispanic black males.

- In 2002, non-Hispanic black males had higher levels of condom use at first and last sex than non-Hispanic white and Hispanic males (Hispanic data available for first sex only)
- Hispanic females and males are less likely to use contraception at first sex, compared to non-Hispanic white and non-Hispanic black males and females
- Hispanic and non-Hispanic Black females have higher percents than non-Hispanic white females of ever using the injectable method of contraception.
- The trends in sexual activity and contraceptive use as measured in 1995 and 2002 are consistent with the downward trend in pregnancies and births to teens observed since 1991
- Teen births
  - Teen females are much less likely to have a birth before reaching age 20 if they used a contraceptive method at their first sex
  - Hispanic females have the highest probability of having a birth before the age of 20 (24 percent compared to 8 percent among non-Hispanic whites)
  - Births to teens are very likely to be unintended (unwanted or mistimed) at conception: 88 percent of births (in the past 5 years) to teens age 17 or younger were unintended.
- Sex education; attitudes among teens
  - The majority of teens received formal instruction before age 18 on how to say no to sex (86% of females and 83% of males )
  - About 2/3 of teens reported receiving instruction on methods of birth control
  - Among teens aged 18-19, one-half of females and about one-third of males had talked with a parent before they were 18 about methods of birth control.
  - Among teens who had not yet had sex, the main reasons for not yet having had sex was that it was “against religion or morals”, followed by “don’t want to get (a female) pregnant”

- Most teens reported that they would be upset if they got pregnant (or got a partner pregnant)