

Fewer American teens having sex, most using birth control

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(HealthDay)—In a finding that should ease parents' minds, new research

shows that fewer American teens are having sex and most of those who do are using some form of birth control.

But scientists also found that [sexual violence](#) has become more common among [high school](#) students and condom use has declined.

"Many [young people](#) become sexually active during high school," said study co-author Laura Lindberg, a principal research scientist at the Guttmacher Institute, the nonprofit research organization that published the report on Sept. 20.

"It is critical to ensure that all young people have access to comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health care services to support their sexual and reproductive decision-making," Lindberg said in a Guttmacher news release.

For the study, the researchers examined national surveys of [high school students](#) conducted in 2013, 2015 and 2017 by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The team looked for trends in sexual activity, use of [birth control](#) and exposure to sexual violence.

Their findings revealed a dramatic drop in the number of sexually active teens.

The study showed that 40 percent of U.S. high school students reported that they ever had sex in 2017. That's the lowest level of sexual behavior among teens since scientists began to keep track in 1991.

Fewer teens of all races and ethnicities reported having sex, the study showed. But the researchers noted this decline was most pronounced among black students.

Teens are more likely to become sexually active as they get older, the

study showed. Just 20 percent of high school freshmen surveyed had ever had sex. The same was true for 57 percent of seniors.

Of the teens who said they were sexually active, nearly 90 percent used some form of birth control the last time they had sex. In 54 percent of these encounters, the teens used condoms. Only 16 percent of the sexually active girls and 10 percent of the sexually active boys surveyed admitted they had not used any contraceptive the last time they had sex.

Younger teens failed to use birth control more often: Roughly 20 percent of ninth-graders said they didn't use a contraceptive the last time they had sex, compared to 10 percent of seniors.

The researchers also found the use of long-acting reversible contraceptives (such as IUDs and contraceptive implants) among teens, which have become more popular among older women, jumped from 2 percent in 2013 to 5 percent by 2017.

Meanwhile, condom use dropped from 59 percent to 54 percent during this time frame. The researchers argued that teens need more education and access to condoms since rates of sexually transmitted diseases among young people are on the rise.

The study also revealed that sexual violence among teens has become more common.

In 2017, 10 percent of students reported experiencing sexual violence, such as forced kissing, touching or rape, in the past year.

The proportion of young women exposed to this abuse was three times as high as among boys. The proportion of students who identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual who faced this sexual violence was also nearly three times as high as heterosexual teens.

"Consent is a critical component of sex education, not only to prevent sexual [violence](#), but to promote healthy communication and development of fulfilling relationships," said Jesseca Boyer, a Guttmacher policy expert. "All young people need and have the right to information, education, skills and services to support their sexual and reproductive health and well-being."

More information: The American Academy of Pediatrics provides more on [adolescent sexual health](#).

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