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Sexual Behavior Among U.S. High School Students, 1990–1995

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Context: High rates of unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV infection, among adolescents are major public health concerns that have created interest in trends in teenage sexual activity.

Methods: Nationally representative data from Youth Risk Behavior Surveys conducted in 1990, 1991, 1993 and 1995 are used to examine levels of sexual experience, age at first intercourse, current sexual activity and condom use at last intercourse among students in grades 9-12.

Results: The proportion of students who reported being sexually experienced remained at 53-54% from 1990 through 1995, while the percentage of sexually active students who used condoms at last intercourse rose from 46% to 54% between 1991 and 1995. Black students were more likely than white students to report being sexually experienced, being currently sexually active and having had four or more lifetime sexual partners; black students also reported a significantly younger age at first intercourse. Gender differences in sexual behavior were found more frequently among black students than among white or Hispanic students.

Conclusions: Although levels of sexual experience for high school students in the United States have not risen during the 1990s, a very high percentage of students continue to be at risk for unintended pregnancy and STDs, including HIV infection.

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