



Fact Sheet:

The Next Best Thing: Encouraging Contraceptive Use Among Sexually Active Teens

May 2000

Rates of teen pregnancy and birth have been steadily declining since the early 90s, driven by fewer teens having sex and more sexually active teens using contraception effectively. Our first priority should always be to encourage teens to delay sexual activity — to protect their physical health, their emotional health, and their opportunities for the future. However, no matter how much encouragement we give young people to say “no,” many will still become sexually active. Here are some of the most compelling issues in our challenge to convince sexually active teens to use contraception.

- C **Many sexually active teens use contraception inconsistently or not at all.** Some 31 percent of teen girls were *completely unprotected* the last time they had sex, and one-third of sexually active teens who *do* use contraception use it inconsistently.¹
- C **Contraceptive use at *first sex* has increased...** In 1988, 65 percent of females aged 15-19 reported using any method of contraception the *first* time they had sex. By 1995, 76 percent of this group reported using contraception at first sex.²
- C **...but contraceptive use at most *recent sex* has decreased.** In 1988, 77 percent of females aged 15-19 used contraception the most *recent* time they had sex. By 1995, only 69 percent reported using contraception at most recent sex.³
- C **Decisions about contraception happen within relationships.** More than one-half of teens (51.7 percent) surveyed recently said that one of the main reasons that teens do not use birth control is because their partners don't want to.⁴
- C **Teaching teens about contraception does not make them have sex.** Research is clear on this point: sex education does not increase sexual activity. In fact, in some cases, teaching teens about contraception seems to *delay* their sexual activity.⁵ And teaching young people the facts about contraception is not necessarily inconsistent with a strong abstinence message.
- C **Access to contraception is necessary but not sufficient.** Restricting sexually active teens from having access to contraception would be a mistake, but simply making contraceptive methods available to teens is not enough to motivate them to protect themselves. Research suggests that making contraceptives available to teens in schools does not increase their sexual activity, but it also doesn't seem to markedly increase sexually active teens' use of contraception either.⁶

- C Teens are much more likely to have unplanned and unprotected sex when they are using alcohol or drugs.** Involvement with alcohol, cigarettes, and/or illicit drugs significantly increases the risk of initiating intercourse before age 16 for boys and girls. And teens 15 and older who drink are seven times likelier to have sexual intercourse and twice as likely to have it with four or more partners than non-drinking teens.⁷ More than one-half of teens (53.3 percent) say the *main reason* teens do not use contraception is because of drinking or using drugs.⁸
- C The younger the teen, the less likely he or she will be to use contraception or to use it effectively.**⁹ Of particular concern is that while teen sexual activity is down (or has leveled off) among most teens, it has risen slightly among those younger than 15, the group least likely to use contraception.¹⁰

For more information:

Please visit the National Campaign's website — www.teenpregnancy.org — to order the following publications:

- C** *The Next Best Thing: Helping Sexually Active Teens Avoid Pregnancy* by John Hutchins.
- C** *Trends in Sexual Activity and Contraceptive Use Among Teens* by Elizabeth Terry and Jennifer Manlove of Child Trends.
- C** *Protection as Prevention: Contraception for Sexually Active Teens* by Claire Brindis, Susan Pagliaro, and Laura Davis.

Sources

1. Hutchins, J. (2000). *The Next Best Thing: Helping Sexually Active Teens Avoid Pregnancy*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.
2. Terry, E., & Manlove, J. (2000). *Trends in Sexual Activity and Contraceptive Use Among Teens*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.
3. Terry & Manlove, 2000.
4. National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. (2000). *Risky Business: Teens Tell Us What They Really Think of Contraception and Sex*. Washington, DC: Author.
5. Hutchins, 2000.
6. Hutchins, 2000.
7. Hutchins, 2000.
8. National Campaign, 2000.
9. Moore, K.A., Driscoll, A.K., & Ooms, T. (1997). *Not Just for Girls: The Roles of Boys and Men in Teen Pregnancy Prevention*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.
10. Hutchins, 2000.

For more on teen pregnancy prevention, visit the National Campaign's website at www.teenpregnancy.org. The National Campaign is a nonprofit, nonpartisan initiative with a goal of reducing the U.S. teen pregnancy rate by one-third between 1996 and 2005.

