



## SEXUAL INTEGRITY INITIATIVE

A resource of CPYU and Project Six19



# TEEN SEXUAL ACTIVITY AND STDs/STIs

| By Jason Soucinek

## SEXUAL ACTIVITY

***In 2013, nearly half (47%) of all high school students reported ever having had sexual intercourse, a decline from 54% in 1991. A similar percentage of male and female high school students report ever having had sex (48% vs. 46%).<sup>1</sup>***

One-third (34%) of high school students are currently sexually active, defined as having had sexual intercourse with at least one person in the previous three months. Almost one-quarter (22%) of these students reported using alcohol or drugs during their most recent sexual encounter. More males reported using alcohol or drugs (26%) compared to females (19%), and white males (28%) had higher rates than black males (19%).<sup>2</sup>

Young women experience the highest rates of rape and sexual assault among all age groups. More than one in five (22%) college women have been victims of physical abuse, sexual abuse, or threats of physical violence.<sup>3</sup> Among women who have ever been raped, 30% were raped when they were between the ages of 11 and 17 and 37% were raped between the ages of 18 and 24.<sup>4</sup>

Twice as many young adults identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) compared to older adults. A 2013 survey found 6.4% of adults ages 18 to 29 identified as LGBT compared to 3.2% of 30 to 49 year olds.<sup>5</sup>

In 2010, the pregnancy rate among female teens ages 15 to 19 was 57.4 per 1,000, a drop of more than 50% since the peak in 1990.<sup>6</sup> Despite the decline in this rate over the past two decades, the U. S. continues to have among the highest teen pregnancy, birth, and abortion rates in the developed world.<sup>7</sup>

## DIFFERENCE BETWEEN STD AND STI

There's a lot of confusion between these two terms. STD stands for *sexually transmitted disease*. "STD" is the most commonly used term for the collection of medical infections that are transmitted through sexual contact. However, people who become infected don't always experience any symptoms or have their infection develop into a disease. That's where the more modern term "STI" comes from.

STI stands for *sexually transmitted infection*, and many people have begun transitioning from "STD" to "STI" in an effort to clarify that not all sexually transmitted infections turn into a disease. For instance, the vast majority of women who contract HPV (human papilloma virus) will not develop the resulting disease cervical cancer. Further, although all STDs are preceded by STIs, not all STIs result in the development of STDs.



***Compared to older adults, sexually active teens and young adults are at higher risk for acquiring STIs, due to a combination of behavioral, biological, and cultural factors.***

## STDs/STIs

Compared to older adults, sexually active teens and young adults are at higher risk for acquiring STIs, due to a combination of behavioral, biological, and cultural factors. Though they make up 25% of the sexually active population, they account for nearly half of new STI cases.<sup>8</sup>

HPV is the most common STI among teens, with some estimates of an infection rate reaching 35% of 14 to 19 year olds.<sup>9</sup> Currently, there are two vaccines (Gardasil and Cervarix) that protect against strains of HPV associated with cervical cancer and genital warts. The CDC recommends that all girls and women up to age 26 receive the three dose course of HPV vaccinations, as well as all boys up to age 21.<sup>10</sup>

Teens ages 15 to 19 and young adults ages 20 to 24 accounted for the most reported cases of Chlamydia and Gonorrhea in 2012. Females are at greater risk than men of acquiring sexually transmitted infections, and the consequences include pelvic inflammatory disease, pregnancy complications, and infertility.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the high rates of infection, many young women do not receive provider counseling on STIs. One-third of teen girls and almost half (45%) of young adult women ages 19 to 25 report

that they have discussed STIs with their providers in the past three years.<sup>12</sup>

Research has found that STI screening rates vary among youth. One study estimates that 37% of young men and 70% of young women ages 15 to 24 had an STI test in the past year.<sup>13</sup> However, in another recent survey, more than half (56%) of young women who reported having an STI test incorrectly assumed it was a routine part of the exam, which often is not the case.<sup>14</sup>

Over 34,000 young people ages 13 to 24 were estimated to be living with HIV in the U.S in 2009.<sup>15</sup> This age group accounts for 26% of new HIV infections. Most young people with HIV/AIDS were infected through sexual contact.<sup>16</sup>

In 2013, 85% of high school students reported that they had been taught about AIDS or HIV infection in school.<sup>17</sup> However, there are still gaps in knowledge about HIV/AIDS. One-third of teens ages 12-17 do not know that HIV is an STI.<sup>18</sup>

## JASON SOUCINEK,

*Executive Director, Project Six19*

<sup>1</sup>CDC. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System: US, 2013. MMWR, 63(4). 2014.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>The White House, "1 is 2 Many: Take Action Against Abuse."

<sup>4</sup>CDC. National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 2011.

<sup>5</sup>Kasier Family Foundation, Women and Health Care in the Early Years of ACA: Key Findings from the 2013 Kaiser Women's Health Survey, May 2014.

<sup>6</sup>Guttman Institute "U.S. Teenage Pregnancies, Births and Abortions, 2010: National Trends by Age, Race and Ethnicity" May 2014.

<sup>7</sup>Guttman Institute. Teen Pregnancy and Lessons Learned, 2002.

<sup>8</sup>CDC. Sexually Transmitted Disease Surveillance. 2012.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>CDC. HPV Vaccine Information for Clinicians- Fact Sheet. 2012.

<sup>11</sup>CDC. Reported STDs in the United States: 2012 National Data for Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, and Syphilis. 2014.

<sup>12</sup>Kaiser Family Foundation analysis of the 2013 Kaiser Women's Health Survey.

<sup>13</sup>Cunningham, S. "Relationships Between Perceived STD-Related Stigma STD-Related Shame and STD Screening Among a Household Sample of Adolescents" PSRH, 2009.

<sup>14</sup>Kaiser Family Foundation analysis of the 2013 Kaiser Women's Health Survey.

<sup>15</sup>CDC. HIV/AIDS Surveillance in Adolescents and Young Adults, 2012.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>CDC. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System: US, 2013. MMWR, 63(4). 2014.

<sup>18</sup>MAC AIDS Fund, U.S. Teen Survey Headline Highlights, 2014.



**SEXUAL INTEGRITY  
INITIATIVE**  
*A resource of CPYU and Project Six19*

**PROJECT  
SIX19**



**PHONE: (509) 993-7272**

**PHONE: (717) 361-8429**

**EMAIL: INFO@PROJECTSIX19.ORG EMAIL: CPYU@CPYU.ORG**

For additional information or resources to help kids navigate their sexuality, visit the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding and Project Six19's Sexual Integrity Initiative website at [SexualIntegrityInitiative.com](http://SexualIntegrityInitiative.com).

CPYU grants permission for this article to be copied in its entirety, provided the copies are distributed free of charge and the copies indicate the source as the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding.