

Why It Matters



Teen Pregnancy, Substance Use, and Other Risky Behavior

It often is the case that risky teen behavior, including drug, alcohol, and tobacco use, delinquency, and sexual activity, occur among the same groups of teens. Therefore, teens who drink or use drugs often are more sexually active and less likely to use contraception when they have sex than teens who take fewer risks. They also tend to have more sexual partners, and often start having sex at younger ages.

- Nearly four in ten high school students report having experimented with marijuana at least once, and over one-third of 12th graders report they have used some type of illicit drug.^{1,2} Approximately two-thirds of 9th graders report having tried alcohol at least once and one-quarter of all high school students say they drink heavily on occasion.¹
- Teens 15 and older who use drugs are more likely to be sexually experienced than are those teens who do not use drugs—72 percent of teens who use drugs have had sex, compared to 36 percent who have never used drugs.³
- Teens who have used marijuana are four times more likely to have been pregnant or to have gotten someone pregnant than teens who have never used marijuana.⁴
- More than one-third of sexually active teens and young adults age 15 to 24 report that alcohol or drug use has influenced them to do something sexual.⁵
- Nearly one-quarter of sexually active teens and young adults age 15 to 24 report that they have had sex without a condom because they were under the influence of alcohol or drugs. And 43 percent of teens and young adults say that they are concerned that they

might do more sexually than they had planned because they are drinking or using drugs.⁵

- Boys who start drinking or smoking at a young age are 40 percent more likely to start having sex at a young age when compared to boys who refrain from such activities. Girls who smoke or drink are even more susceptible—prior use of alcohol and/or cigarettes increases the risk of early sexual experience by 80 percent.⁶

More than one-third of sexually active teens and young adults age 15 to 24 report that alcohol or drug use has influenced them to do something sexual.

- Many teenage girls who use alcohol when they first have sex are too drunk to use birth control successfully.⁷
- Almost one-quarter of all high school students used alcohol or drugs prior to their last sexual experience. Non-Hispanic white and Hispanic teens are more likely than non-Hispanic black teens to report having used alcohol or drugs before their last sexual experience.¹
- Seventh graders who report being sexually experienced are more likely than their sexually inexperienced peers to report having committed a theft, damaged property, or threatened a teacher.⁸

SOURCES

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance - United States 2005*, in *Surveillance Summaries, MMWR*. 2006.
2. Johnston, L.D., O'Malley, P.M., Bachman, J.G., & Schulenberg, J.E., *Monitoring the Future national results on adolescent drug use: Overview of Key Findings, 2006*. 2007, National Institute on Drug Abuse: Bethesda, MD.
3. The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA), *Dangerous Liaisons: Substance Abuse and Sex, 1999 Analysis of 1997 YRBS data*. 1999, The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University New York.
4. The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA), *Substance Abuse and the American Adolescent: A Report by the Commission on Substance Abuse Among American Adolescents*. 1997, The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University New York, NY.
5. *Youth Knowledge and Attitudes on Sexual Health: A National Survey of Adolescents and Young Adults*. in *Dangerous Liaisons: Substance Abuse and Sexual Behavior*. 2002.
6. Kandel, D.B., *Early onset of adolescent sexual behavior and drug involvement*. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 1990. 52: p. 783-798.
7. *Some Sobering Facts on Alcohol and Teen Pregnancy*. 1998, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy: Washington, DC.
8. Farrell, A.D., Danish, S.J., & Howard, C.W., *Relationship Between Drug Abuse and Other Problem Behaviors in Urban Adolescents*. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 1992. 60(3): p. 705-712.