Teenagers and sexual issues

Summary

- Most young people in Years 10 and 12 are sexually active to varying degrees.
- One in four teenagers report they were either drunk or high during their most recent sexual encounter.
- Most teenagers do not practice safe sex.

Unsafe sex practices and unwanted pregnancy are significant health issues for Australian teenagers. The bulk of the information in this article was taken from the 2002 results of the third National Survey of Australian Secondary Students, HIV/AIDS and Sexual Health, carried out by the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society and funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing.

Sexual activity and teenagers

Most young people in Years 10 and 12 are sexually active to varying degrees. Selected statistics include:

- About one in four Year 10 students and half of all Year 12 students have had vaginal intercourse.
- Of the young people who had ever had sex, about half of the males and 61% of the females had at least one sexual partner in the last year.
- Between 15% and 19% had two sexual partners in the last year.
- 37.3% of Year 10 students and 56.7% of Year 12 students have engaged in oral sex.
- The most recent sexual encounter for about two thirds of young people was with their regular girlfriend or boyfriend.
- The most recent sexual encounter for 10.8% of teenagers was with someone they had met for the first time, with higher figures for males (18.1%) than females (4.6%).
- Students in Year 10 are more likely to have had their most recent sexual encounter with someone they met for the first time (15%) than students in Year 12 (7.6%).

Sexual attraction and teenagers

Selected statistics on sexual attraction include:

- Most young people (93%) reported attraction to members of the opposite sex.
- 4.6% are attracted to both sexes, with less than one per cent stating they are solely interested in same sex partners.
- Males are more likely to report same sex attraction, while females are more likely to report attraction to both sexes.
- About 2% of the most recent sexual encounters at the time of the survey were with a person of the same sex.

Preferred forms of contraception

Selected statistics on the form of contraception used at the most recent sexual encounter include:

- Condoms - 64.4%
- The pill - 36.8%
- Withdrawal - 11.8%
- No contraception used - 9.4%

Contraception - common issues for teens

Contraception issues for young people include:
A New South Wales study found that 86% of young people in relationships of one year’s duration or less don’t use condoms every time they have sex.

Over half of those who use the contraceptive pill don’t use condoms to protect themselves from sexually transmissible infections (STIs).

About 50% of teenagers are sexually active for 12 months before they visit their doctor for prescription contraception.

Around half of all teenage pregnancies occur within the first six months of becoming sexually active.

Young people are the most common users of the morning after pill at Australian family planning clinics.

Statistics from 1998 show that medical abortion is the second most common hospital procedure for Australian women aged between 12 and 24 years.

According to Medicare records from 1997 to 1999, there were 22 abortions per 1,000 teenagers, which is one of the highest teenage abortion rates in the West, following USA, Hungary, New Zealand, United Kingdom and Canada.

### Safe sex for teens

Most teenagers aren’t practising safe sex. Selected statistics include:

- One in four teenagers have had sexual intercourse without using a condom.
- Only 40% of Year 12 students always use condoms.
- Of Year 12 students, males are more likely to report using condoms (52.2%) than females (34%).
- One in four teenagers report they were either drunk or high during their most recent sexual encounter.
- Estimates suggest that about 28% of Australian teenagers may be infected with chlamydia.

### Sexual confidence and teenagers

Selected statistics include:

- Most young people feel confident they can deal successfully with issues such as unwanted sex or a partner who is unwilling to use a condom.
- Most young people don’t feel confident they can talk about sexual issues such as contraception with their parents.
- Most young people (68.8%) talk to their partner about condom use before they have sex.
- Prior discussion with a sexual partner about other sexual issues is uncommon; for example, only 23.6% of young people talk with their partners about how to reduce the risk of STIs.
- 22.8% of young people didn’t discuss any sex-related issues, such as condom use and avoiding pregnancy or STIs, prior to their most recent sexual encounter.

### Unwanted sex and teenagers

Over one in four teenagers had experienced an unwanted sexual encounter. Selected statistics include:

- 5% of teenagers reported that their most recent sexual experience was unwanted.
- 15.9% experienced unwanted sex because they were drunk, with higher figures for females (17.6%) than males (13.9%).
- 6.1% experienced unwanted sex because they were using recreational drugs, with higher figures for males (6.9%) than females (5.4%).
- 12.6% experienced unwanted sex because they were pressured by their partner, with higher figures for females (13.9%) than males (11%).
- 2% experienced unwanted sex because they were pressured by their friends, with higher figures for males (2.9%) than females (1.2%).

### Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Kids Helpline Tel. 1800 551 800
- Parentline Tel. 132 289

betterhealth.vic.gov.au
Things to remember

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- Most teenagers do not practice safe sex.