

INTRODUCTION

The sexual and reproductive health of our youth is an important issue in our community that requires our attention. Teens and young adults are greatly impacted by sexually transmitted diseases/infections (STDs). More than 2,000 STD cases were reported in Spokane County in 2008; the majority (1,400) of these cases were reported in teens and young adults 15 to 24 years of age. The rate of STDs in Spokane has been increasing. In 2008, the rate of STDs for teens and young adults was (1,976 cases per 100,000 of the population) in Spokane County, which was higher than the rate in Washington State (1,758 cases per 100,000). Our teens and young adults are also greatly impacted by unintended pregnancies. There were an estimated 1,766 unintended pregnancies in Spokane County in 2008 to females 15 to 24 years of age.

Engaging in unsafe sexual activity and/or having sex too soon can have lasting and unintended consequences. In 2009, the Spokane Regional Health District (SRHD) conducted a random telephone survey of Spokane County teens 15 to 19 years of age and young adults 20 to 24 years of age. Survey questions addressed sexual history, risky behaviors, and use of health services. This fact sheet presents findings from the survey. The information offers new insight on the sexual health of teens and young adults in our community.

SEXUAL HISTORY

43% of teens 15 to 19 years of age are sexually active.

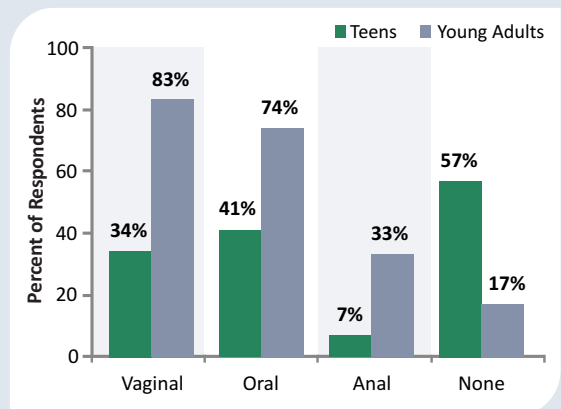
In Spokane County:

- Nearly two-thirds of 15 to 24 year olds are sexually active.
- The average age at first sexual encounter was approximately 16 years.
- The average number of lifetime sex partners reported was 3.3 for teens and 6.9 for young adults.

Though the majority of respondents indicated that they did not use alcohol or drugs the last time they had sexual intercourse, teens and young adults with 5 or more sexual partners were twice as likely to have reported drug/alcohol use during their last sexual encounter than those with less than 5 partners.

Figure 1

Types of Past Sexual Behavior



POVERTY AND SEXUAL HISTORY

There is a significant association between income level and sexual activity. Of teens and young adults whose household incomes are below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), 74% engaged in some type of sexual activity compared to 58% whose household incomes are greater than 200% of the FPL.[1]

Compared to teens and young adults with household incomes above 200% FPL, youth living in poverty:

- Had their first sexual encounter at a younger age (15.5 vs. 16.3 years of age).
- Averaged nearly twice as many sexual partners (8.3 compared to 4.6).
- Were less likely to have used condoms the last time they had sex (55% compared to 39%).



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[1] In 2008, 200% of Federal Poverty Level was \$42,400 annually for a family of four or \$20,800 for a one person household.

BIRTH CONTROL USAGE

58% of all teens think that birth control pills and/or condoms should be available in high schools.

Nine out of ten sexually active teens and young adults used birth control the last time they had intercourse. Condoms are the most popular form of birth control used. More than half (57%) of teens and young adults reported using condoms the last time they had intercourse and one-third (34%) took birth control pills. Approximately one out of nine sexually active respondents indicated that they did not use any type of birth control.

Of the teen and young adult respondents:

- Those having less than 5 sexual partners in their lifetime are more likely to use condoms.
- Slightly more than half (52%) of those who have had vaginal sex have had at least one pregnancy scare.
- Teens are more likely than young adults to use condoms.



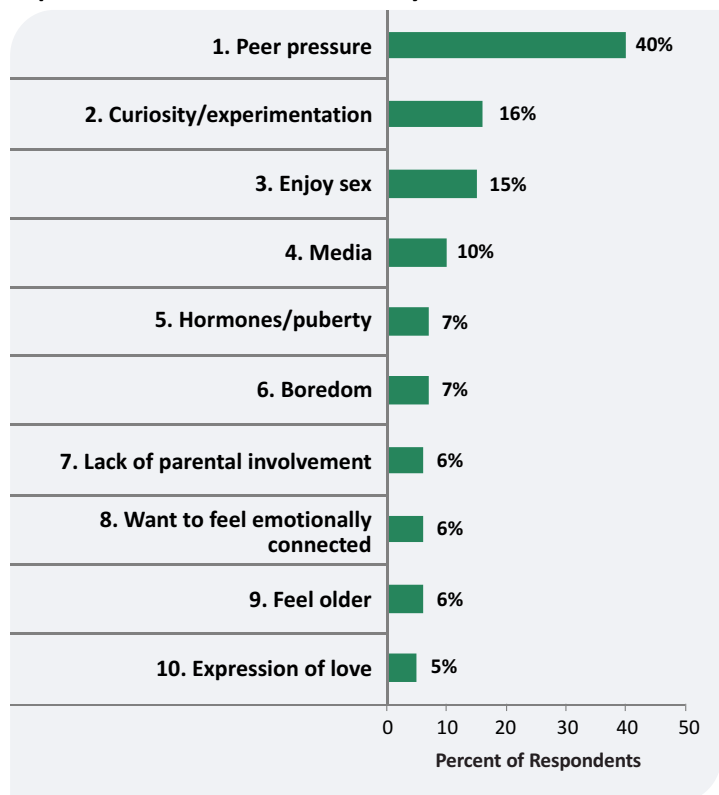
REASONS FOR SEXUAL ACTIVITY

Of respondents, 53% reported that the media, including magazines, movies, television, and music, is a major influence on teens' and young adults' sexual behavior, but only 10% say it is a reason for sexual activity. The respondents felt the main reason that young people are sexually active is peer pressure or to be like their friends.



Figure 2

Top 10 Reasons for Sexual Activity



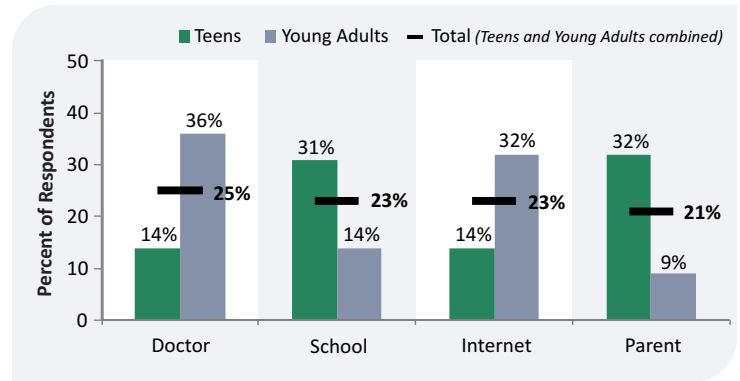
INFORMATION ABOUT SEX

Nearly all teens and young adults (99%) indicated that sex education should be taught in public schools, and most (89%) say that schools should provide comprehensive sex education as opposed to teaching abstinence only.

Young adults indicated that their primary sources of information about sex and sexual activity is their doctor (36%) or the internet (32%). In contrast, more teens seek information from their parents (32%) or at school (31%). Parents are the primary educators of their children, but 21% of teens indicated that the information provided about sex within their families was somewhat or very inadequate.

Figure 3

Sources of Information About Sex and Sexual Activity



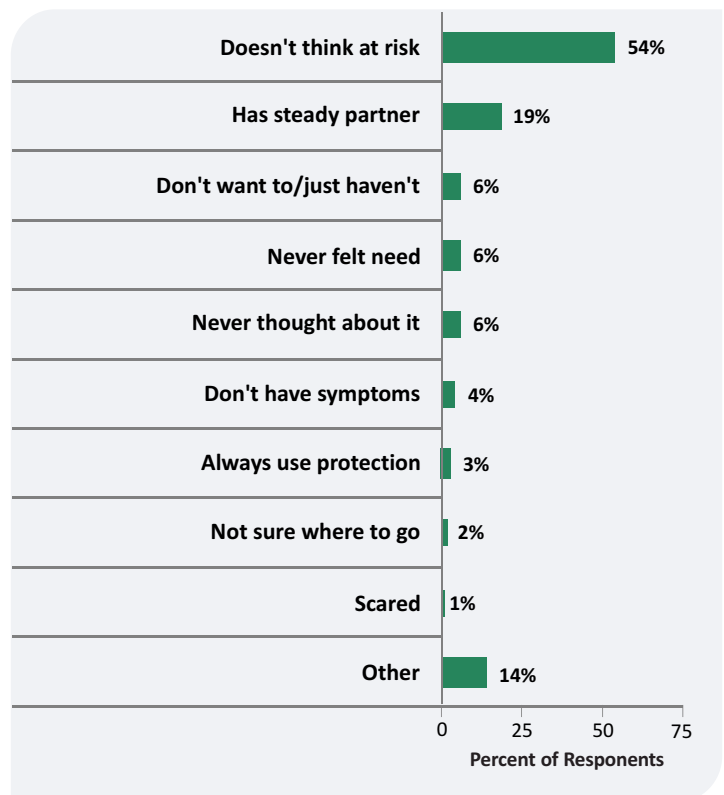
HEALTHCARE AND STD TESTING

- The majority of respondents (88%) have regular health check-ups with their doctor—69% indicated having had a health check-up within the past year.
- Respondents reporting a recent health check-up (within the past two years) were less likely to have used alcohol or drugs prior to engaging in sexual activity.
- Nearly half (49%) of sexually active teens indicated that they had never been tested for STDs.
- Respondents with household incomes greater than 200% of the FPL were less likely to have been tested than their counterparts in households with income below 200% FPL.

School-based health centers at high school or middle schools provide limited health services to students (e.g. health education, diagnosis and treatment of minor illnesses, physicals, STD testing, immunizations, counseling). Spokane does not currently have school-based health centers, but 51% of teens say they would be likely to use them.

Figure 4

Reasons for Never Being Tested for STDs



CONCLUSION

This information helps us understand the factors that place teens and young adults at risk of acquiring an STD or having an unintended pregnancy. SRHD is working on increasing screening and treatment of STDs by targeting healthcare providers with information and educational opportunities to enhance their ability to provide consistent and appropriate screening and treatment for people at risk. Concurrent efforts to raise awareness and perception of risk among our youth and community partners, who are most likely to be affected, are necessary for successful prevention and control efforts.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Support comprehensive sex education in public schools.
- Refer teens to www.THEDAILYRISK.com for accurate, comprehensive information about sex, and preventing STDs and unintended pregnancy. This site is a great resource for educators, too!
- Talk to your kids about sex – parents are the primary educators! **Need help?** Visit the parent section on www.THEDAILYRISK.com.
- Support the Healthy Youth Survey (HYS), including the addition of new questions about sexuality. The HYS is administered to teens during the school year on even years. This survey is our best source of information about the health of our youth.
Learn more at: <https://fortress.wa.gov/doh/hys/>
- Encourage sexually active teens to protect themselves against STDs and unintended pregnancies and to seek regular health check-ups, including STD testing.



Is your teen at risk?
www.THEDAILYRISK.com