

Sexual Behaviour

AMONG BC YOUTH

The results of the 2003 Adolescent Health Survey show that there have been a number of positive developments in youth's sexual health behaviour. Across BC youth are waiting longer to have sex, and among those who do have sex, condom use has risen.

Sexual activity

In 2003, the percentage of youth in grades 7 through 12 who reported having sexual intercourse was 24%. This is the same figure as 1998 but less than 1992 (30%). There was little gender difference, with 23% of males and 24% of females reporting they had ever had sexual intercourse. Sexual experience increases with age: only 7% of 13-year-olds have ever had sex, compared to 21% of 15-year-olds, and 43% of 17-year-olds.

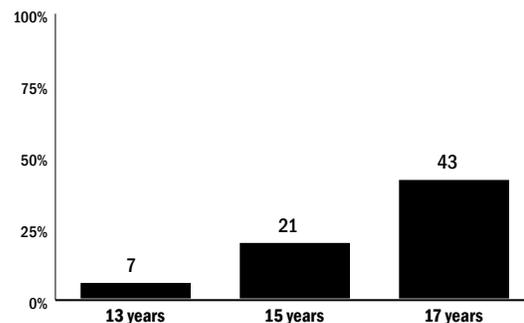
There are significant regional variations in sexual behaviour. Youth in Greater Vancouver have the lowest rate of sexual activity at 18%, compared to 27% in the Capital Region and 31% in the Kootenays. These figures are virtually unchanged from 1998.

Early sexual activity – associated with sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unwanted pregnancy – has declined over the past decade. The number of 13 year olds who say they have ever had sex has halved from 14% in 1992 to 7% in 2003.

This fact sheet is one of a series on various health issues among BC youth, and may be copied for use as a handout. Data for the fact sheets were collected in the BC Adolescent Health Survey (2003), a 140-question survey completed by over 30,500 students in grades seven to twelve, in schools throughout BC. In all, 45 of BC's 59 school districts agreed to take part in the survey. The first Adolescent Health Survey was conducted in 1992, and the second in 1998. In total, more than 72,400 BC students have completed the survey over a ten-year period.

The Adolescent Health Surveys were conducted by the McCreary Centre Society, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the health of BC youth through research, information sharing, and community-based projects that address the unmet health needs of young people.

Age and Sexual Experience



Gender of sexual partners

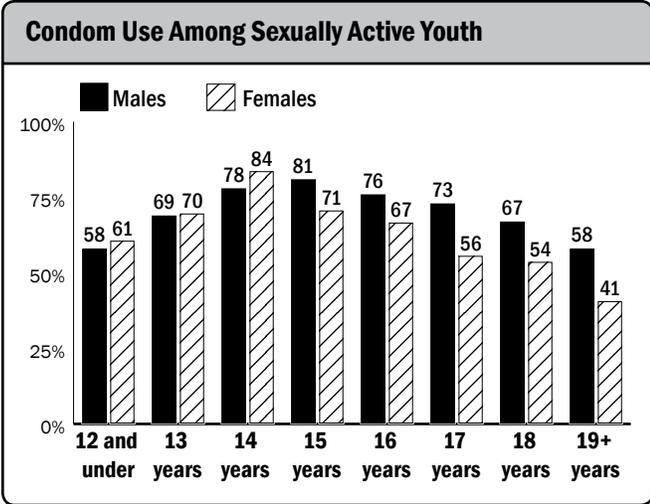
Of those who reported being sexually active in the past year, nine out of ten youth (91%) reported only opposite-gender partners, 1% reported experience with same-gender partners only, 5% of female youth and 2% of male youth reported having sex with both same-gender and opposite-gender partners. As well, 5% of youth who classed themselves as sexually experienced had no sexual partner within the past year.

Risk of STI's and safer sexual practices

More sexually active youth are protecting themselves against sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Condom use at last sex significantly increased from 58% in 1992 to 64% in 2003. Not surprisingly, as condom use rose, the numbers of youth reporting ever having an STI fell, from 6% to 4% in the same time period.

However, condom use also declines with age. Eighty one percent of sexually active 14-year-olds said they used a condom at last intercourse, compared to only 61% of 18-year-olds. This may be because older youth are opting for hormonal methods of contraception instead of condoms, but such methods do not protect against STIs. Youth who are intoxicated may also





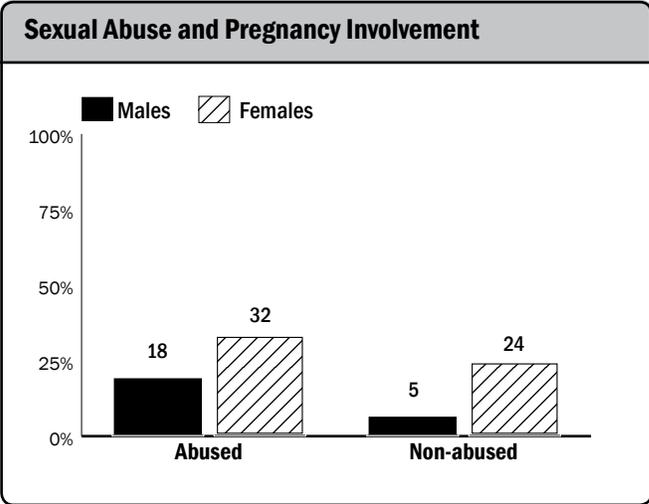
find it difficult to practice safe sex; almost a third (29%) of sexually active youth said that they used alcohol or drugs before the last time they had sex, a slight drop from 33% in 1998.

Sexual violence can impact a youth’s ability to make healthy sexual choices. Approximately 13% of females and 2% of males reported they had been sexually abused. Male youth who reported a history of sexual abuse were less likely to have used a condom at last sex (only 59% used a condom, vs. 75% of non-abused youth). Both males and females who had been sexually abused were also more likely than non-abused peers to report using drugs or alcohol before sex (45% abused males vs. 30% non-abused males; 32% abused females vs. 24% non-abused females).

Pregnancy

As the overall use of condoms has risen, so has the use of birth control pills and other methods of contraception. Forty two percent of sexually active youth used the pill, up nine percentage points since 1998. Although condom use was less common among older youth, the use of birth control pills was more common: the rate of sexually active teens who reported using birth control pills at last sex is only 20% among 13-year-olds, but 50% among 17-year-olds.

In 2003 the number of sexually-experienced female youth who reported ever being pregnant was down from 10% in 1992 to 6% in 2003. However, the number of male youth who reported a pregnancy had resulted from their sexual activity remained relatively unchanged, from 7% in 1992 to 6% in 2003. Males were twice as likely as females to report involvement in more than one pregnancy, although this group is very small (2% of males and 1% of females reported being involved in 2 or more pregnancies).



Sexual violence also contributes to the risk of pregnancy. Among sexually-experienced males, 18% of those who reported a history of sexual abuse reported causing one or more pregnancies, compared to only 5% of non-abused males. Among sexually-experienced females, 1 in 3 of those who had been sexually abused had ever been pregnant, compared to 24% of those who had not been sexually abused.

Promoting sexual health

Youth’s behaviours are influenced by their relationships with family, school, and peers. When teens reported feeling cared about by their parents, satisfied in their relationships with their parents, and being highly connected to their families, males were 75% less likely and females were 90% less likely to report ever having sex than youth who felt little or no connection.

Feeling connected to a safe and caring school is also linked to healthier sexual choices. Youth who reported strong school connectedness were 90% less likely to report being sexually active.

Finally, friends make a difference too. The survey asked if students thought their friends would be upset if they got pregnant or caused a pregnancy. The overwhelming majority of females (80%) reported their friends would be upset if they got pregnant, although this number decreased to 75% for young women in grade 12. The percentage of males who thought their friends would be upset if they got someone pregnant was considerably lower, at only 62%. Even so, among sexually active males and females, those who thought their friends disapproved were half as likely to have ever been pregnant or to have got someone pregnant than those who did not think their friends would disapprove.