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- › [Infectious Diseases & Tuberculosis Control](#)
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- › [Public Health Home](#)
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Bulletin No. 23

May 9, 1997

Sexual Behavior Among Alaska Adolescents

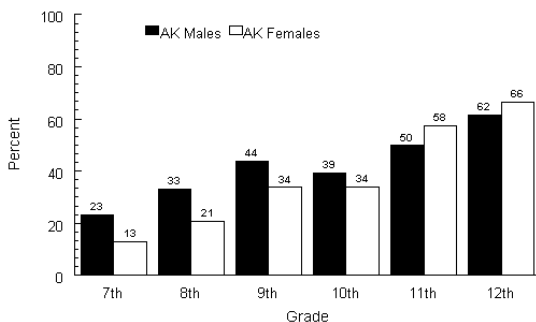
Introduction

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) measures health risk behaviors related to the leading causes of mortality, morbidity and social problems among youth in the United States. In 1995, Alaska implemented the survey for the first time among high school and middle school students.¹ The survey sampled a representative group of high school and middle school students (1,634 high school and 1,265 middle school students). Six categories of adolescent behavior were examined: behaviors that result in unintentional and intentional injuries; tobacco use; alcohol and other drug use; sexual behaviors; dietary behaviors; and physical activity.

Students Who Report Having Had Sexual Intercourse at Least Once.

Overall 47% of Alaska high school students and 23% of middle school students reported having had sexual intercourse at least once. Rates increased with grade level and were similar for males and females in high school. Middle school male students were more likely than female students to report having had sexual intercourse at least once.

Figure 1. Percent of Alaska Students Who Reported Having Had Sexual Intercourse at Least Once by Grade and Gender



Sexual Behavior of Students Currently Sexually Active

Overall 31% of Alaska high school students reported that they were "currently sexually active" (sexual intercourse at least once in the past three months). Male students were more likely to have had multiple sex partners during the last three months than female students (Table 1).

Table 1. Alaska High School Students: Percent of Sexually Activity Students Who Reported Having Had More than One Sexual Partner in the Last Three Months

Number of Sexual Partners in Past 3 Months	Student's Gender	
	Female	Male
1 person only	76%	63%
2-3 persons	22%	25%
4 or more persons	3%	13%

Of high school students who reported having sexual intercourse during the past three months, 54% practiced "safe sex" by using a condom during their last sex. Male high school students were more likely to report condom use during last sexual intercourse than female students (56% and 44% respectively). One quarter (25%) of male high school students reported "withdrawal or no method used to prevent pregnancy" during last sexual intercourse, compared to 34% of female high school students. Only 18% of currently sexually active female high school students reported using birth control pills as their method of birth control. More than one-in-four (27%) of currently sexually active high school students reported that they had used alcohol or drugs before last sexual intercourse. Male use of alcohol or drugs during last sexual intercourse was higher than females (61% and 40% respectively).

Early Initiation of Sexual Intercourse

Among Alaska high school seniors who reported being currently sexually active, 9% reported they had first sexual intercourse prior to age 13, 32% ages 13-14, and 60% age 15 and older. High risk behaviors tend to be more prevalent among students who reported early initiation of sexual activity than later onset or not active at all. (Table 2).

Table 2. Percent reporting high risk behaviors among Alaska high school students

		Age when first had sexual intercourse			
		< 13 yr>	13-14 yr	15+yr	NeverHad
Physical fighting (1)	Female	62%	47%	20%	15%
	Male	65%	68%	44%	31%
Current smokers (2)	Female	65%	61%	41%	22%
	Male	66%	54%	50%	17%
Current drinkers (3)	Female	66%	65%	56%	31%
	Male	70%	72%	64%	33%
Current marijuana use (4)	Female	54%	44%	33%	12%
	Male	64%	47%	46%	15%
Seriously considered suicide (5)	Female	47%	46%	39%	24%
	Male	30%	21%	18%	11%
Have driven while drinking (6)	Female	12%	15%	12%	7%
	Male	21%	20%	25%	7%
Have carried a weapon in past 30 days (7)	Female	41%	15%	5%	7%
	Male	56%	50%	30%	28%
Have been/gotten someone pregnant (8)	Female	27%	13%	10%	NA
	Male	10%	13%	3%	NA
(1) One or more times in past 12 months (2) At least once in past 30 days (3) At least one day in past 30 days (4) At least once in past 30 days (5) During the past 12 months		(6) Once or more in past 30 days (7) Once or more in past 30 days (weapon such as gun, knife or club) (8) One or more times			

Discussion

Parrillo, Felts, and Mikow-Porto² report that several health-risks and health-risk behaviors are significantly associated with early-onset (initiation) of sexual intercourse. Alaska's YRBS data are consistent with their findings. The data suggest that significant numbers of teens become sexually active before entering high school, and that there are negative consequences associated with early initiation of sexual intercourse. Based on the data, it is evident that educating pre-teens about the **risks of early initiation** of sexual activity - and the **benefits of delaying onset** of such activity - should remain a high priority for schools within the context of comprehensive health education.

References

1. Youth Risk Behavior Survey Alaska Report 1995. Alaska Department of Health and Social Services and Department of Education, February 1996.
2. Parrillo AV, Felts WM, and Mikow-Porto V. (1997) Early initiation of sexual intercourse and its co-occurrence with other health-risk behaviors in high school students: the 1993 North Carolina Youth Risk Behavior Survey. *J of Sch Health* 1997;28(2):85-93.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), 1995

To obtain a copy of the full YRBS report, contact the State of Alaska, Section of Epidemiology, P.O. Box 240249, Anchorage, Alaska 99524-0249, phone 907-269-8000, fax 907-562-7802.

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