

## Sexual Behavior, Sexually Transmitted Infections, and Unintended Pregnancy

In the United States, sexual activity significantly decreased among youth in the 1990s through 2009. As a result, unintended pregnancy and birth among teens in 2009 was 39.1 births per 1000 females, which represents a 37% decrease from 61.8 births per 1000 females in 1991 ([Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011a](#)). This is the lowest teen birth rate ever in the United States, yet other developed countries have much lower teen birth rates. Rates of STIs and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection among teens have increased, although this may be due to increased testing and better sensitivity of STI testing. However, many sexually active young people engage in behaviors that put them at risk for STIs or pregnancy, such as having sex with multiple partners and having sex without using contraception.

Obtaining a sexual history can be an important step in promoting sexual health and preventing STIs and unintended pregnancies among young people. Questions about sexuality should be prefaced by an explanation of the purpose and limits of confidentiality. Initially questions can cover less sensitive topics, such as pubertal development, and then address dating behaviors, gender attractions, and sexual activity. Screening questions regarding sexual attractions and experiences should be phrased in ways that allow adolescents to discuss same- and opposite-gender attractions, such as the term *partner* instead of *boyfriend* or *girlfriend*. Sexually active youth should be asked about their consistency and motivation to use condoms or other barrier methods for preventing STIs; use of birth control pills or other forms of hormonal contraception; the number of sexual partners over the past 6 months; and the use of alcohol or other substances in connection with sexual activity.

Sexually active adolescents should be screened for STIs with laboratory tests for gonorrhea, chlamydia, and if applicable, syphilis. For females, a Papanicolaou (Pap) test to detect human papillomavirus (HPV) infection or other cervical dysplasia. Both males and females should be evaluated for HPV by visual inspection and should also be asked about whether they have received the HPV vaccine series. Adolescents at risk for HIV infection should be offered confidential HIV screening tests. The