

# Enhancing Teen Health and Well-Being

## GETTING DOCTORS TO FOCUS ON SEXUAL HEALTH OF YOUNG MEN

*The health and well-being of all young people is vitally important, not only to allow them to make the most of their early years but to avoid problems that can deepen over a lifetime. Addressing their sexual and reproductive health is a challenging, but important, component of enhancing young people's overall health.*

### THE CHALLENGE

Routine health care for young men does not adequately incorporate sexual and reproductive health concerns. Sexually transmitted diseases are the most common infections occurring among adolescents and young adults, yet most lack knowledge about the risks and dangers involved. Even though they see a health professional regularly, the majority of teenage boys and young men in their 20s don't get adequate information about such concerns as AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), limiting the number of sexual partners, or condom use.

No system provides young men specialized reproductive health and family planning care comparable to that afforded young women. Access to care is especially an issue for teen boys and young men without health insurance, who are unlikely to go to the doctor for any reason.

### THE FACTS

Seventy-one percent of young men 15-19 years old, and 56 percent of those 21-26 years old, told researchers in a 1995 national survey (the most recent data available), that they had a physical exam during the previous year, but fewer than one-third used this opportunity to discuss AIDS, other STDs, or condom use with a health professional. Even smaller proportions were tested for HIV or other STDs.

Young men without health insurance are at particular risk of not receiving services. In the 1995 survey more than two-thirds of males ages 15-19 *with health insurance* reported receiving a physical exam in the past year. But among the 11

percent of teen boys *without health insurance*, fewer than half said they had received a physical exam.

If health professionals are missing opportunities to promote young men's sexual health, how are young men getting their reproductive health information? One important place is the media. Teenage boys and young men get information—often a mixed message—from magazines, radio and television shows, and the newspapers. In fact, almost one-third of men in their twenties relied solely on information from the media.

**Minorities Get More Info:** Among young men, minority males get more reproductive information and services from health professionals than do white males. But, minority males are at greater risk for AIDS and other STDs than non-Hispanic whites, and also more likely to be sexually active at younger ages.

#### Getting Doctors to Focus on Sexual Health of Young Men

	Discussed sexual health with health professional	Obtained HIV test
<b>Teenage boys</b>		
Non-Hispanic White	25%	14%
African American	47%	26%
Hispanic	35%	20%
<b>Men in their 20s</b>		
Non-Hispanic White	17%	27%
African American	42%	43%
Hispanic	36%	31%

Source: Urban Institute, 2002

### Young Adults Get Less Info But Face Greater Risks:

Young adult men have just as much—if not more—need for reproductive health information and services as do teens, but receive less. Young adulthood is the age of greatest sexual activity. Men in their 20s have more sexual intercourse than teen males but use condoms less often, resulting in greater rates of STDs and unintended pregnancies. They are less likely to see a doctor routinely, and less likely to receive prevention messages in school.

### Teenage Girls Affected by Young Men's Behavior:

Age differences between sexual partners mean that sexual risk-taking among men in their 20s often result in STDs and unintended pregnancies among teenage girls. Making sure that boys and young men have the necessary reproductive information and services also helps promote the health of girls and young women.

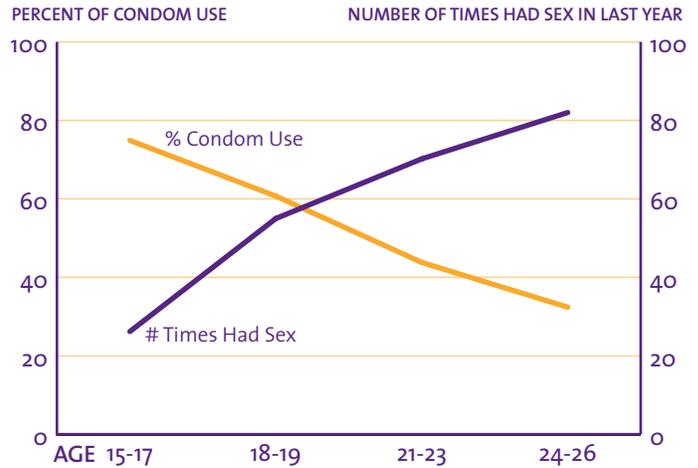
### WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

*Health professionals* should seize existing opportunities and create new ones to discuss sexual health issues and provide related health services to teenage boys and to young men in their 20s. These professionals must:

- Become confident and comfortable discussing sexual issues, AIDS, STDs and condom use.
- Continually find ways to bring up issues related to sexual health, and to urge young men to limit the number of sexual partners, take tests for AIDS and other STDs, as well as use condoms, if sexually active.
- Make sexual and reproductive health services an integral part of routine care visits for young men.

*Health Intervention Programs* must be located where teenagers and men in their 20s can easily access them. Since young men are less likely to visit a doctor than women, information by doctors must be supplemented by information from other sources. Many young men are involved in athletics and team sports. Health-focused programs can partner with existing sports activities or sponsor new sporting events to attract boys and young men. Job training and placement services and workplaces could be targeted to reach men in their 20s with limited ties to school or to health professionals.

### Sexual Risk Behaviors Among Young Men, by Age



Source: 1995 National Survey of Adolescent Males, Urban Institute, 2002

### THE DATA

The statistical findings are based on analyses of data from the 1995 cohorts of the National Survey of Adolescent Males. Program recommendations were compiled by The Young Men's Sexual and Reproductive Health Working Group, convened by the Urban Institute.

### FURTHER DETAILS

Sonenstein, Freya L., editor. 2000. *Young Men's Sexual and Reproductive Health: Toward a National Strategy*. Urban Institute.

- *Framework and Recommendations* (November 2000)
- *Getting Started* (December 2000)

Bradner, Carolyn H., Leighton Ku, and Laura Duberstein Lindberg. 2000. "Older, But Not Wiser: How Men Get Information about AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases after High School," *Family Planning Perspectives* 32(1): 33-38.

Porter, Laura E., and Leighton Ku. 2000. "Use of Reproductive Health Services among Young Men, 1995." *Journal of Adolescent Health* 27: 186-194.

Sonenstein, Freya, Leighton Ku, Laura Duberstein Lindberg, Charles Turner, and Joseph Pleck. 1998. "Changes in Sexual Behavior and Condom Use among Teenaged Males: 1988 to 1995." *American Journal of Public Health* 88(2): 956-959.

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