

Snapshot of Girls' Health in NH

Behaviors and life styles that we develop in adolescence have long lasting impacts on adulthood. 70% of adolescent health issues and mortality have preventable causes, including sexual and reproductive health, nutrition, alcohol, tobacco and other drug use and intentional injury. This fact sheet reports some of the data available in NH on these topics.

Sexual and reproductive health...

Good News:

- The percent of 9-12th grade girls who reported ever having sexual intercourse followed a downward path and decreased from 53% to 44% between 1993 and 2007.¹
- Number of teen pregnancies in NH is significantly lower than the national average. NH ranks 48th in the nation for teenage pregnancy: 47/1000 girls aged 15-19 become pregnant each year in NH, compared to 84/1000 nationally.²
- Safer sex practices are spreading among NH girls. From 2003 to 2007 there was an 8% increase (50 - %58) in condom use in 9-12th grade girls who reported having sexual intercourse.¹



- The use of birth control pills as a form of contraceptive is on the rise in NH. In 1993, 29% and in 2007 38% of NH girls used birth control pills. Moreover, NH girls are more than twice as likely to use birth control pills compared to their counterparts in the Nation. 38% of 9-12th grade girls used birth control pills during their last sexual intercourse compared to 18% nationally.¹

Challenges:

- In NH, less than half of the girls who need contraceptive services receive them. Over 22,000 girls (15-19 year old) need publicly-supported contraceptive services, but only 9,650 teenage girls are served by Title X-supported clinics.²
- Despite the increases in safe sex practices, 42% NH girls continue to have unsafe sex.¹
- Nationwide, more teens are engaging in oral sex, believing it to be a safer alternative to sexual intercourse.¹
- Girls who live in the poorest communities are at an increased risk for pregnancy and STD's (41/1000 vs. 11/1000 in the wealthiest communities). The rate of chlamydia infection among teens is also higher in the poorer communities (40/1000 vs. 9/1000).⁴



*Statistics in this fact sheet refer to NH girls, unless otherwise noted.

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Body image, nutrition, physical activity...

Good News:

- Although the number of overweight girls in NH remained steady, 9-12th grade NH girls were less likely than boys to be overweight (16% v. 13%) or at risk of becoming overweight (16% v. 7%).¹
- The gap between the percentage of NH girls who view themselves as overweight and the ones who are actually overweight is getting smaller. In 2003 40% of NH girls believed they were overweight, while only 7% were actually overweight. In 2005, the gap between these figures declined to 29% (8% overweight, 37% thought they were overweight).¹

Challenges:

- Almost half of the NH girls who view themselves as overweight are in fact not overweight. Despite the fact that 20% of 9-12th grade NH girls were overweight or at risk of being overweight (males= 32%), 37% described themselves as overweight (males= 27%), and 65% were trying to lose weight (males= 30%).¹



- NH girls are engaging in unhealthy weight loss habits. 60% of 9-12th grade girls modified their diet to lose or keep from gaining weight during the past 30 days. Sixteen percent (17%) went without eating for more than 24 hours, 6% took diet pills, powders, or liquids without a doctor's advice, and 7% made themselves vomit or took laxatives.¹
 - A significant percentage of NH girls don't have a healthy diet. Nationally, 9-12th grade girls are not getting the recommended amounts of fruits, vegetables, and milk. Only 23% ate 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day, and only 14% drank 3 or more glasses of milk a day.¹
- More than half of the NH girls don't get enough exercise. 59% of 9-12th grade girls did not participate in any kind of physical activity that increased their heart rate and made them breathe hard some of the time for a total of at least 60 minutes per day on 5+ days.¹

Substance abuse...

NH girls who smoke are smoking less frequently. The percent of 9-12th grade girls who reported smoking 20 or more days out of the past 30 decreased from 21% to 8% between 1995 & 2007.¹

However other challenges remain to be met. Although majority of NH girls who smoke tried to quit smoking¹, the rate of smoking remains stable. 9-12th grade girls who reported regularly smoking at least 1 cigarette everyday dropped only 1% between 2003 and 2005 to 13%.¹

In addition, 12% of NH girls drove after drinking at least once in the last month.¹ 18% of 9-12th grade girls had someone offer, sell, or give them an illegal drug on school property during the past 12 months.¹ The percentage of NH girls who binge on alcohol also remains steady. Since 1993, this figure fluctuated 1% and remained between 27% and 28%.¹



Mental health...

The percentage of NH girls who thought about killing themselves declined dramatically since 1995. In 1995, 31% of NH girls reported that they considered attempting suicide. In 2007, this number was 17%.¹ However, other mental health challenges are fairly widespread among NH girls. Last year, 32% of 9-12th grade girls (males =17%) felt so sad or hopeless for two weeks or more in a row that they stopped doing their usual activities, 17% seriously considered attempting suicide (males= 10%), 12% made a plan for how they would attempt suicide (males= 17%), and 8% actually attempted suicide 1+ times (males= 3%).¹ In addition, NH girls (32%) are almost twice as more likely to experience depressive symptoms as NH boys (17%).¹



Parents Matter!

Parents have direct influences on the physical and mental health of their teens by providing guidance about health-related matters and by helping youth access healthcare information and services.⁵ Good communication between parents and teens can support healthy development. According to Steinberg⁵ teens whose parents communicate their values and expectations regarding sexual activity not only delay intercourse longer than peers whose parents do not openly discussed sex, they also engage in fewer risky sexual activities. In addition, teens who have effective communication with their parents achieve more in school, score higher on self-esteem, and report less depression and anxiety.

¹ 1993, 2003, 2005 & 2007 NH and National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) accessed at <http://www.ed.state.nh.us/education/doe/organization/instruction/HealthHIVAIDS/documents/2007YRBSResultsSummaryRept.pdf> & <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/index.htm>, on November 14, 2008.

² Alan Guttmacher Institute accessed at <http://www.guttmacher.org/sections/pregnancy.php> & <http://www.guttmacher.org/sections/contraception.php>, on November 13, 2008.

³ Remez, L. (2000). Oral sex among adolescents: Is it sex or is it abstinence? *Family Planning Perspectives*, 32(6), 298-304.

⁴ NH Kids Count Data Book 2003.

⁵ Baber, K., Bean, G. & Harrington, L., (2006). *Girls Speak Up! Conversations with Young Women About Critical Issues in Their Lives*. Durham, NH. University of New Hampshire.