

# Parents Are the Foundation

## Teen and Health

September 2007

Our teenagers are growing up in a society that has seen tremendous changes in lifestyles that affect their health. There are new vaccines, new drugs of choice, expanded nutrition information, and a variety of sexually transmitted diseases. And those families with limited or no health care coverage have to make tough health care choices.

In the 2005 SEARCH survey of 1,264 Iowa County youth, 61% reported they take good care of their body. This a thriving indicator youth need for a healthy future. 82% of youth surveyed know there is a nurses' office at their school, however, only 14% have been to the school nurse's office for help or advice.

Students were asked about the 'number of times you had classes in school that taught about sexuality, nutrition and exercise.' The responses shown in Chart A show that our 7<sup>th</sup> graders remember classes on these topics however, 12<sup>th</sup> graders report significantly fewer classes on all these topics.



Chart A: Student responses to the statements "I have attended 3 or more classes in school taught about importance of nutrition, exercise, or sexuality".

The 2005 SEARCH Iowa County survey asked students about their values regarding having sex as a teenager.

As shown in Chart B, 72% of 7<sup>th</sup> graders are against having sex as a teenager. This number steadily decreases until 11<sup>th</sup> graders responded with 22% and 12<sup>th</sup> graders 23% against having sex as a teenager.

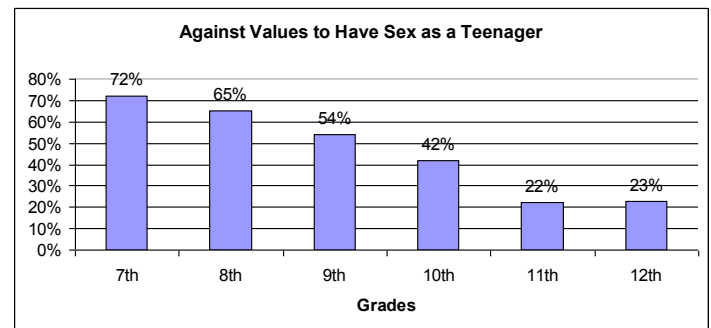


Chart B: Percentage of students who responded agree or strongly agree to the question, "It is against my values to have sex while I am a teenager."

### Discussing Sexuality with Teens

Many teens avoid talking with their parents about sexual issues in their lives—not so much because they don't care about our opinions or want help from us, but because they're convinced we'll flip out. To open the lines of communication. . . .

**Start earlier than you think you need to.** If your child is accustomed to discussing these things with you in a calm, rational way—he or she is going to be more likely to trust you to be calm and helpful in later years when the subject may be more personal.

**Offer information in the form of options, choices and consequences.** However much we'd like to control teenage sexuality and keep our children safe—we can't. They are in charge of their lives and choices. The more reliable information they have on what their options are and what the consequences of those choices will be, the better a position they will be in to make those choices healthy ones.

Five emerging health issues facing teens are: osteoporosis, steroid use, HPV and the vaccine, meningococcal meningitis, and inhalants.

### **Steroids**

Have you seen teens who are steroid users? They have an appearance which looks odd to your eye. And the reason they look odd is that the area around the shoulders and the upper body, gets disproportionately big relative to other parts.

Steroids are readily available off the Internet and have been a problem for about two decades. Risks for teens that use steroids include remaining shorter than average for the remainder of his/her life if taken before a growth spurt plus all the other risks: cancer, acne, trembling, increases in bad cholesterol, and high blood pressure.

Don't confuse corticosteroids, prescribed by your doctor to treat certain conditions with anabolic steroids. These are two entirely different substances. If you have any concerns, talk to your doctor, school nurse, or guidance counselor.

### **HPV and the Vaccine**

According to the CDC, genital human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted virus in the United States. Most HPV infections don't cause any symptoms, and go away on their own. But HPV is important mainly because it can cause cervical cancer in women.

HPV vaccine can prevent most genital warts and most cases of cervical cancer and is available to girls age 9 to 26. As this is a new vaccine, parents and their daughters need to ask professionals for more information.

A great source is your doctor, school nurse or the staff at the Iowa County Health Department (935-2810). At this time the Iowa County Health Department is administering the vaccine free to girls under 19 years of age.

### **Meningococcal Meningitis**

If you have a high school senior going off to college in the fall be aware there is a rare, but sometimes deadly disease called meningococcal meningitis. Cases of this disease among adolescents and young adults have increased by nearly 60% since the early 1990's. Freshmen living in dormitories are up to six times more likely to get the disease than other people.

Each year, the disease strikes about 2,500 Americans, 10% to 15% of them will die and up to 20% of survivors have long-term disabilities. Currently the Iowa County Health Department has the vaccine available. Other sources are your doctor and university health services.

### **Inhalants-New Drug of Choice for Young Teens**

Inhalants are sniffed, sprayed and huffed from rags, bags or balloons. They are found in your home, are legally obtained, fast-acting, and cheap. Common inhalants are gasoline, glue, shoe polish, paint thinner, correction fluid, spray paints and felt-tipped markers. Using inhalants can lead to severe brain, liver and kidney damage and death.

Some highlights from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, covering the years 2002-2003: 8.6% of 12 and 13-year olds said they had used inhalants and more kids ages 12 and 13 chose inhalants than marijuana to get high.

According to the National Inhalant Prevention Coalition, middle school students seem the most at risk. Parents have to assume their teens know about inhalants. Some signs of abuse are paint stains on fingers, vomiting, watery eyes, confusion, and empty containers in your home. Talk with your health care professional or school counselor for more information.

**REMEMBER:  
PARENTS ARE THE FOUNDATION!**

"Parents are the Foundation" is a monthly, school-year newsletter containing information from the 2005 Survey of Student Resources and Assets in Iowa County Schools by America's Promise and the Search Institute and the University of Wisconsin-Extension Iowa County. This series is adapted from the UW-Extension Teen Assessment Project "Whose Kids?...Our Kids!" newsletter series. This issue was written by Sarah Weier and edited by Ruth Schriefer, Deb Ivey and June Meudt. Thanks are extended to the 1,264 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> graders in Highland, Mineral Point, Pecatonica and River Valley who participated in the survey. For more information, contact us at UW-Extension Iowa County, 608-935-0391 or on the web at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/iowa/>