

Sexually Experienced Teens

Headline

The percentage of high school students who have ever had sexual intercourse declined between 1991 and 2001 from 54 percent to 46 percent; starting in 2003, however, this proportion began to increase slightly and was at 48 percent in 2007. ([See Figure 1](#))

Importance

Adolescents who become sexually experienced at an early age have a greater time period during which they are at-risk for pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). A younger age at first sexual intercourse is associated with a variety of negative sexual consequences among male and female teens, including a greater likelihood of having nonvoluntary or unwanted sex,¹ having multiple sexual partners,^{2, 3} and having a teenage birth.⁴

Although U.S. teenagers are not consistent contraceptive users as a whole, some studies have found that the likelihood a teen will use any form of contraception increases with age at first sex.⁵ Female teens that used contraception during their first sex are also less likely to have a teen birth before the age of twenty.⁶ An older age at first sexual intercourse has also been associated with a greater likelihood of using contraception at most recent intercourse.⁷

Trends

The percentage of high school students who have ever had sexual intercourse declined between 1991 and 2001 from 54 percent to 46 percent; starting in 2003, however, this proportion began to increase slightly and was at 48 percent in 2007. ([See Figure 1](#))

Differences by Gender

In 2007, male high school students were slightly more likely to report ever having had sexual intercourse than were females (50 and 46 percent, respectively). This difference was driven mainly by male Hispanic and non-Hispanic black students, who were both 12 percentage points more likely than their female peers to report ever having had sexual intercourse in 2007. ([See Table 1](#)) There was no significant difference between non-Hispanic white male and female students: in 2007, 44 percent of both groups reported ever having had sexual intercourse. ([See Table 1](#))

Differences by Race and Ethnicity⁸

Non-Hispanic black high school students overall are the most likely to have ever had sexual intercourse (67 percent in 2007). The same year, 52 percent of Hispanic high

school students and 44 percent of non-Hispanic white high school students reported having ever had sexual intercourse. (See Figure 1) Among females in 2007, however, non-Hispanic white students and Hispanic students were about equally likely to have had sexual intercourse (44 and 46 percent, respectively). In 2007, 61 percent of black non-Hispanic female high school students reported having ever had sexual intercourse. (See Table 1)

Differences by Age

The percentage of students who are sexually experienced increases by grade. In 2007, 33 percent of ninth graders had ever had sexual intercourse, compared with 65 percent of twelfth graders. (See Figure 2)

State and Local Estimates

2007 estimates of sexual experience among high school students (Grades 9-12) are available for selected states and cities by gender from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) at: <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/yrbss>

International Estimates

1997/1998 estimates of sexual experience among 15-year-olds in 9 selected countries can be found in a World Health Organization (WHO) policy report, *Health and Health Behavior Among Young People*, at: http://www.hbsc.org/downloads/Int_Report_00.pdf (See Figure 10.1)

International estimates are also found from UNICEF's research center at: <http://www.unicef-icdc.org/publications/index.html>

National Goals

Through its *Healthy People 2010* initiative, the federal government has set national goals to:

- increase the percentage of adolescents who remain virgins by age 15 to 88 percent by 2010, from a 1995 level of 79 percent for males and 81 percent for females;⁹ and
- increase the percentage of adolescents ages 15 to 17 years who are virgins to 75 percent by 2010 from a 1995 level of 62 percent among females and 57 percent among males.¹⁰

To reach these goals, the government is recommending that teens be comprehensively taught about abstinence, pregnancy and STIs, as well as taught skills to help avoid sexual activity.¹¹

More information is available at:

<http://www.health.gov/healthypeople/document/html/objectives/09-08.htm>

(See Goals 9-8 and 9-9)

Definition

Sexually experienced is defined as ever having had sexual intercourse in one's lifetime.

Data Source

Data for 1991: YRBSS: Youth Online, Comprehensive Results. Retrieved May 24, 2004 from URL: <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/yrbss/>.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Surveillance Summaries*:

Data for 1993: March 24, 1995. MMWR 1995; 44 (No. SS-1): Table 20.

<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/MMWRFile/ss4401.htm#00001034.htm>

Data for 1995: September 27, 1996. MMWR 1996; 45 (No. SS-4): Table 26.

<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/MMWRFile/ss4504.htm#00001944.htm>

Data for 1997: August 14, 1998. MMWR 1998; 47(No. SS-3): Table 26.

<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/MMWRFile/ss4703.htm#00003367.htm>

Data for 1999: June 9, 2000. MMWR 2000; 49(No. SS-5): Table 30.

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss4905a1.htm#tab30>

Data for 2001: June 28, 2002. MMWR 2002; 51(No. SS-4): Table 30.

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5104a1.htm#tab30>

Data for 2003: May 21, 2004. MMWR 2004; 53(No. SS-2): Table 42.

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5302a1.htm#tab42>

Data for 2005: June 9, 2006. MMWR 2006; 55 (No. SS-5): Table 44.

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5505a1.htm>

Data for 2007: June 6, 2008. MMWR 2007 (No. SS-4) Table 61.

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5704a1.htm#tab61>

Raw Data Source

Youth Risk Behavior Survey

<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/yrbs/index.htm>

Approximate Date of Next Update

Summer 2010

¹ Chandra A, Martinez GM, Mosher WD, Abma JC, Jones J. Fertility, family planning, and reproductive health of U.S. women: data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth. *Vital Health Statistics* 2005; 23 (25). http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_23/sr23_025.pdf; Moore, K.A., Manlove, J., Gleib, D.A., & Morrison, D.R. (1998). "Nonmarital School-Age Motherhood: Family, Individual, and School Characteristics." *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 13(4), 433-457.

² Chandra A, Martinez GM, Mosher WD, Abma JC, Jones J. Fertility, family planning, and reproductive health of U.S. women: data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth. *Vital Health Statistics* 2005; 23 (25). http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_23/sr23_025.pdf

³ Santelli, J.S., Brener, N.D., Lowry, R., Bhatt, A., & Zabin, L. (1998). "Multiple Sexual Partners among U.S. Adolescents and Young Adults." *Family Planning Perspectives*, 30(6), 271-275.

⁴ Manlove, J., Terry, E., Gitelson, L., Papillo, A.R., & Russell, S. (2000). "Explaining Demographic Trends in Teenage Fertility, 1980-1995." *Family Planning Perspectives*, 32(4), 166-175.; Smith, C.A. (1997). "Factors Associated with Early Sexual Activity among Urban Adolescents." *Social Work*, 42(4), 334-346.; Thornberry, T.P., Smith, C.A., & Howard, G.J. (1997). "Risk Factors for Teenage Fatherhood." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 59, 505-522.

⁵ Manning, W.D., Longmore, M.A., & Giordano, P.C. (2000). "The Relationship Context of Contraceptive Use at First Intercourse." *Family Planning Perspectives*, 32(3), 104-110. Mauldon, J. & Luker, K. (1996). "The Effects of Contraceptive Education on Method Use at First Intercourse." *Family Planning Perspectives*, 28(1), 19-24 & 41.

⁶ Chandra A, Martinez GM, Mosher WD, Abma JC, Jones J. Fertility, family planning, and reproductive health of U.S. women: data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth. *Vital Health Statistics* 2005; 23 (25). http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_23/sr23_025.pdf

⁷ Santelli, J.S., Lowry, R., Brener, N.D., & Robin, L. (2000). "The Association of Sexual Behaviors with Socioeconomic Status, Family Structure, and Race/Ethnicity among U.S. Adolescents." *American Journal of Public Health*, 90(10), 1582-1588.

⁷ Race/ethnicity estimates from 1999 and later are not directly comparable to earlier years due to federal changes in race definitions. In surveys conducted in 1999 and later, respondents were allowed to select more than one race when selecting their racial category. Estimates presented here only include respondents who selected one category when choosing their race.

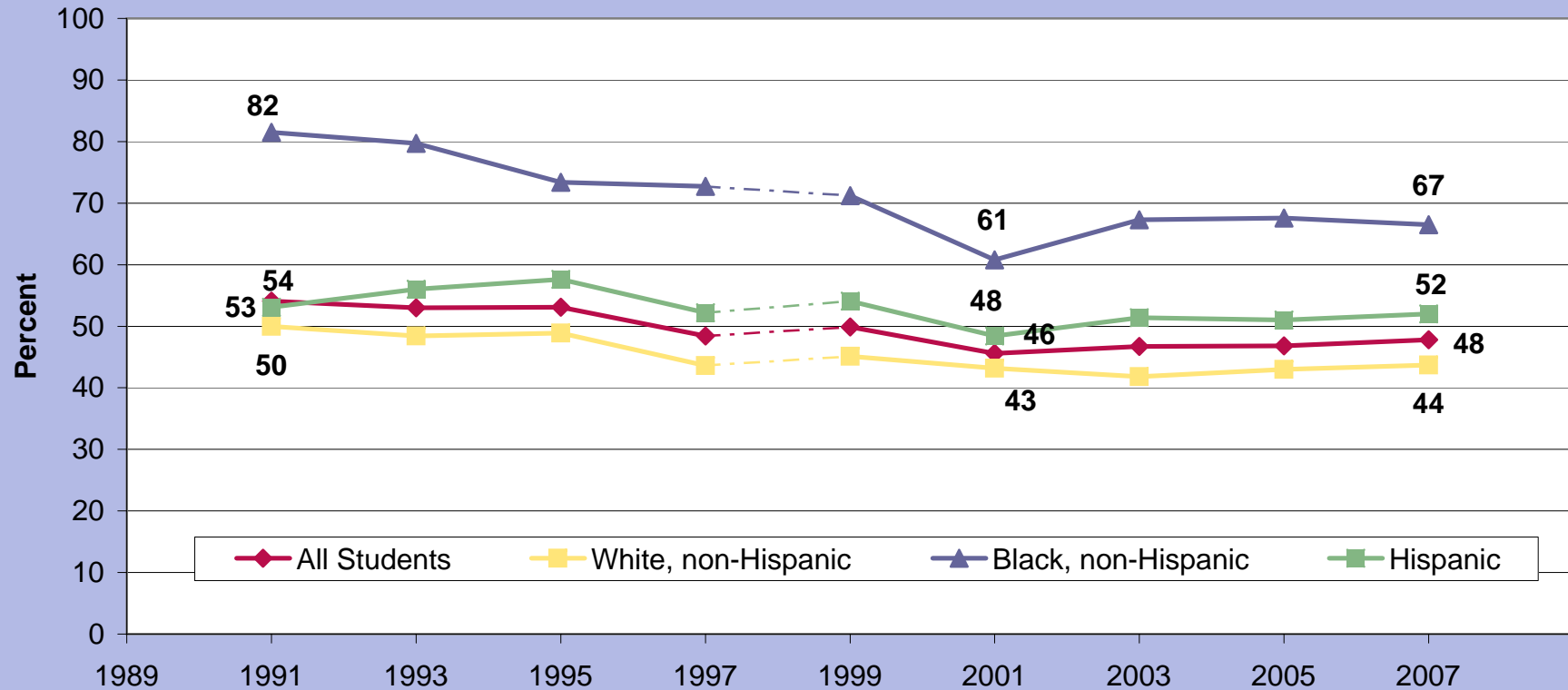
⁹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Healthy People 2010. 2nd ed. With Understanding and Improving Health and Objectives for Improving Health*. 2 vols. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 2000. <http://www.health.gov/healthypeople/document/html/objectives/09-08.htm> (Goals 9-8 & 9-9).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Figure 1

Percentage of Students in Grades 9 through 12 Who Report Ever Having Had Sexual Intercourse,¹ by Race and Hispanic Origin, 1991-2007



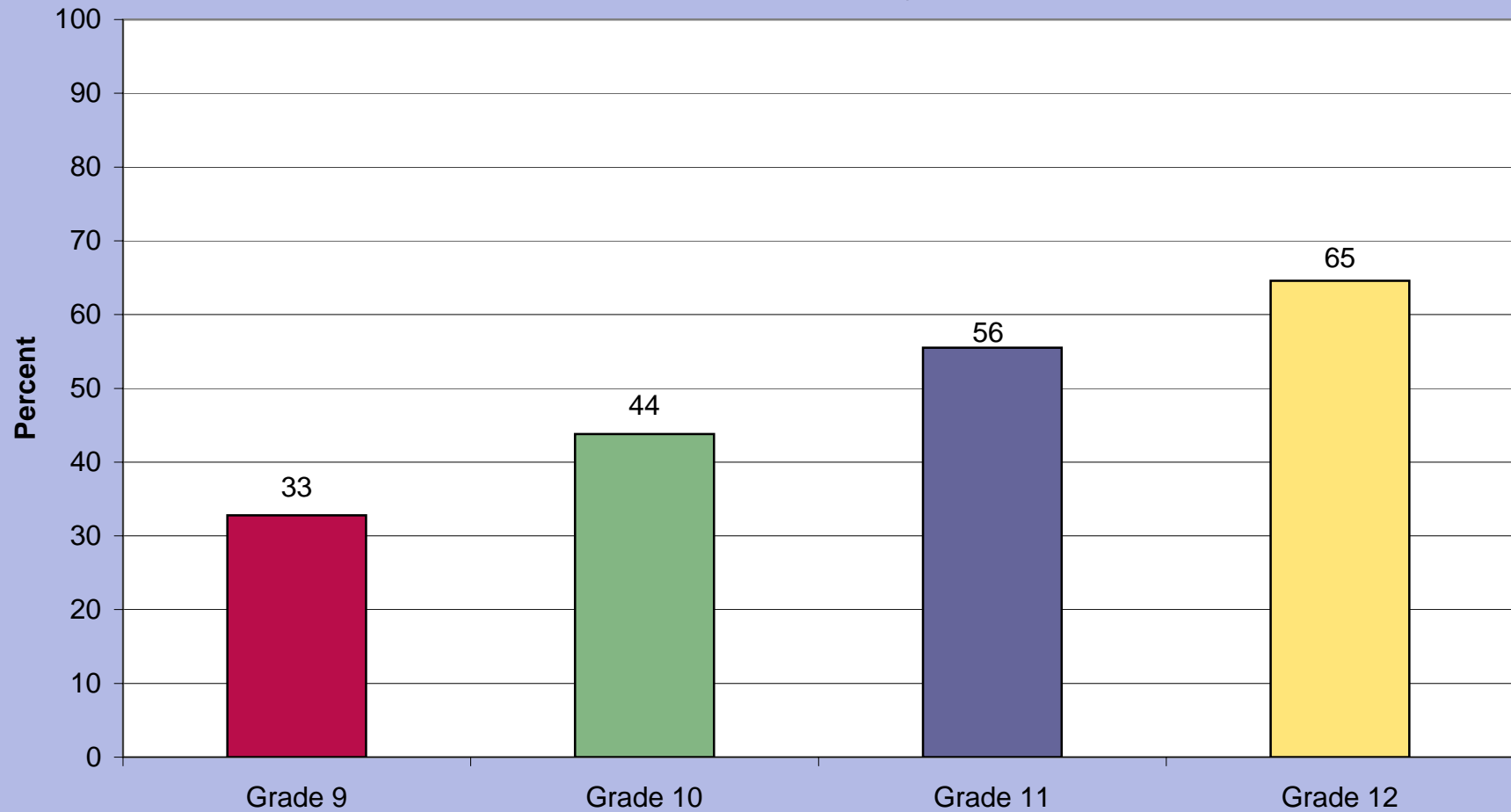
¹Sexually experienced is defined as ever having had sexual intercourse in one's life.

²Race/ethnicity estimates from 1999 and later are not directly comparable to earlier years due to federal changes in race definitions. In surveys conducted in 1999 and later, respondents were allowed to select more than one race when selecting their racial category. Estimates presented only include respondents who selected one category when choosing their race.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Surveillance Summaries*: Data for 1991: YRBSS: Youth Online, Comprehensive Results. Retrieved May 24, 2004 from URL: <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/yrbss/>. Data for 1993: March 24, 1995. MMWR 1995; 44 (No. SS-1): Table 20. Data for 1995: September 27, 1996. MMWR 1996; 45 (No. SS-4): Table 26; Data for 1997: August 14, 1998. MMWR 1998; 47 (No. SS-3): Table 26. Data for 1999: June 9, 2000. MMWR 2000; 49 (No. SS-5): Table 30; Data for 2001: June 28, 2002. MMWR 2002; 451 (No. SS-4): Table 30. Data for 2003: May 21, 2004. MMWR 2004; 53 (No. SS-2): Table 42. Data for 2005: June 9, 2006. MMWR 2006; 55 (No. SS-5): Table 44. Data for 2007: June 6, 2008. MMWR 2007 (No. SS-4) Table 61.

Figure 2

Percentage of Students in Grades 9-12 Who Report they Have Ever Had Sexual Intercourse,¹ by Grade, 2007



¹Sexually experienced is defined as ever having had sexual intercourse in one's life.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC Surveillance Summaries, June 6, 2008. MMWR 2007 (No. SS-4) Table 61.

Table 1

Sexually Experienced Teens:¹ The Percentage of Students in Grades 9-12 Who Have Ever Had Sexual Intercourse, Selected Years, 1991-2007

| | 1991 | 1993 | 1995 | 1997 | 1999 | 2001 | 2003 | 2005 | 2007 |
|-----------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| All Students | 54.1 | 53.0 | 53.1 | 48.4 | 49.9 | 45.6 | 46.7 | 46.8 | 47.8 |
| Race/Ethnicity² | | | | | | | | | |
| White, non-Hispanic | 50.0 | 48.4 | 48.9 | 43.6 | 45.1 | 43.2 | 41.8 | 43.0 | 43.7 |
| Black, non-Hispanic | 81.5 | 79.7 | 73.4 | 72.7 | 71.2 | 60.8 | 67.3 | 67.6 | 66.5 |
| Hispanic | 53.1 | 56.0 | 57.6 | 52.2 | 54.1 | 48.4 | 51.4 | 51.0 | 52.0 |
| Grade | | | | | | | | | |
| 9 | 39.0 | 37.7 | 36.9 | 38.0 | 38.6 | 34.4 | 32.8 | 34.3 | 32.8 |
| 10 | 48.2 | 46.1 | 48.0 | 42.5 | 46.8 | 40.8 | 44.1 | 42.8 | 43.8 |
| 11 | 62.4 | 57.5 | 58.6 | 49.7 | 52.5 | 51.9 | 53.2 | 51.4 | 55.5 |
| 12 | 66.7 | 68.3 | 66.4 | 60.9 | 64.9 | 60.5 | 61.6 | 63.1 | 64.6 |
| Male | 57.4 | 55.6 | 54.0 | 48.9 | 52.2 | 48.5 | 48.0 | 47.9 | 49.8 |
| Race/Ethnicity² | | | | | | | | | |
| White, non-Hispanic | 52.7 | 49.3 | 48.9 | 43.3 | 45.4 | 45.1 | 40.5 | 42.2 | 43.6 |
| Black, non-Hispanic | 88.1 | 89.2 | 81.0 | 80.3 | 75.7 | 68.8 | 73.8 | 74.6 | 72.6 |
| Hispanic | 64.1 | 63.5 | 62.0 | 57.7 | 62.9 | 53.0 | 56.8 | 57.6 | 58.2 |
| Grade | | | | | | | | | |
| 9 | 45.6 | 43.5 | 40.6 | 41.8 | 44.5 | 40.5 | 37.3 | 39.3 | 38.1 |
| 10 | 50.9 | 47.4 | 50.0 | 41.7 | 51.1 | 42.2 | 45.1 | 41.5 | 45.6 |
| 11 | 64.5 | 59.5 | 57.1 | 49.3 | 51.4 | 54.0 | 53.4 | 50.6 | 57.3 |
| 12 | 68.3 | 70.2 | 67.1 | 60.1 | 63.9 | 61.0 | 60.7 | 63.8 | 62.8 |
| Female | 50.8 | 50.2 | 52.1 | 47.7 | 47.7 | 42.9 | 45.3 | 45.7 | 45.9 |
| Race/Ethnicity² | | | | | | | | | |
| White, non-Hispanic | 47.1 | 47.4 | 49.0 | 44.0 | 44.8 | 41.3 | 43.0 | 43.7 | 43.7 |
| Black, non-Hispanic | 75.9 | 70.4 | 67.0 | 65.6 | 66.9 | 53.4 | 60.9 | 61.2 | 60.9 |
| Hispanic | 43.3 | 48.3 | 53.3 | 45.7 | 45.5 | 44.0 | 46.4 | 44.4 | 45.8 |
| Grade | | | | | | | | | |
| 9 | 32.2 | 31.6 | 32.1 | 34.0 | 32.5 | 29.1 | 27.9 | 29.3 | 27.4 |
| 10 | 45.3 | 44.9 | 46.0 | 43.5 | 42.6 | 39.3 | 43.1 | 44.0 | 41.9 |
| 11 | 60.2 | 55.1 | 60.2 | 50.3 | 53.8 | 49.7 | 53.1 | 52.1 | 53.6 |
| 12 | 65.1 | 66.3 | 66.0 | 61.9 | 65.8 | 60.1 | 62.3 | 62.4 | 66.2 |

Note: Estimates do not include youth who dropped out of school and therefore may not reflect total national percentages.

¹Sexually experienced is defined as ever having had sexual intercourse in one's lifetime.

²Race/ethnicity estimates from 1999 and later are not directly comparable to earlier years due to federal changes in race definitions. In surveys conducted in 1999 and later, respondents were allowed to select more than one race when selecting their racial category. Estimates presented only include respondents who selected one category when choosing their race.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC Surveillance Summaries, Data for 1991: YRBSS: Youth Online, Comprehensive Results. Retrieved May 24, 2004 from URL: <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/yrbss/>. Data for 1993: March 24, 1995. MMWR 1995; 44 (No. SS-1): Table 20. Data for 1995: September 27, 1996. MMWR 1996; 45 (No. SS-4): Table 26; Data for 1997: August 14, 1998. MMWR 1998; 47(No. SS-3): Table 26. Data for 1999: June 9, 2000. MMWR 2000; 49(No. SS-5): Table 30; Data for 2001: June 28, 2002. MMWR 2002; 51 (No. SS-4): Table 30. Data for 2003: May 21, 2004. MMWR 2004;53(No. SS-2): Table 42. Data for 2005: June 9, 2006. MMWR 2006; 55 (No. SS-5): Table 44. Data for 2007: June 6, 2008. MMWR 2007;57(No. SS-4). Table 61.