Among Teens, Sex and Heroin Use Are Down But Depression Is on the Rise

A CDC report reveals new trends.

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Last week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released its biannual National Youth Risk Behavior Survey report, revealing both encouraging and troubling trends regarding HIV and hepatitis C virus (HCV) risk. According to the report, sex and heroin use are down among American teens, but depression is on the rise.

The CDC report draws on high schoolers' responses to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey between 2007 and 2017. The data pool consisted of more than 14,750 students across 26 states and 13 large urban school districts across the country.

Findings showed that the proportion of high school students reporting sexual activity decreased from 47.8 percent in 2007 to 39.5 percent in 2017. However, condom use decreased among youth over the past decade, falling from 61.5 percent in 2007 to 53.8 percent in 2017.

Survey results also revealed that use of illicit drugs (defined as cocaine, heroin, methamphetamines, inhalants, hallucinogens or ecstasy) also decreased from 22.6 percent in 2007 to just 14 percent of students in 2017. But 14 percent of students in the survey said they had misused a prescription opioid at least once, however this is the first year teens were asked about prescription opioids.

While the findings suggest significant gains in the reduction of HIV and hepatitis C–related risk factors, one major issue is of concern: the mental health of teens. According to the survey, the proportion of teens who said they had persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness increased from 28.5 percent in 2007 to 31.5 percent in 2017. More teens are also reporting that they have seriously considered suicide, with response rates increasing from 14 percent to 17.2 percent over the past 10 years.

"Overall, I think youth are making better decisions, particularly about their sexual behavior and drug use," said Kathleen Ethier, director of the CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health in the National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD and TB Prevention. "At the same time, the rate of violence and victimization they're experiencing hasn't gone down. Bullying hasn't decreased. The proportion of youth who have ever been physically forced to have sex has not

decreased.”

To read the full findings, click here.

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