

# SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

## SEXUAL ACTIVITY

### U.S. HEALTHY PEOPLE YEAR 2000 OBJECTIVES

- 5.4 Reduce to 15 percent or less the percentage of adolescents who have engaged in sexual intercourse before age 15
- 5.5 Increase to at least 40 percent the percentage of ever sexually active adolescents age 17 or younger who abstained from sexual activity for the previous three months
- 5.8 Increase to at least 85 percent the proportion of people ages 10-18 who have discussed human sexuality, including correct anatomical names, sexual abuse, and values surrounding sexuality, with their parents and/or have received information through another parentally endorsed source, such as youth, school, or religious programs

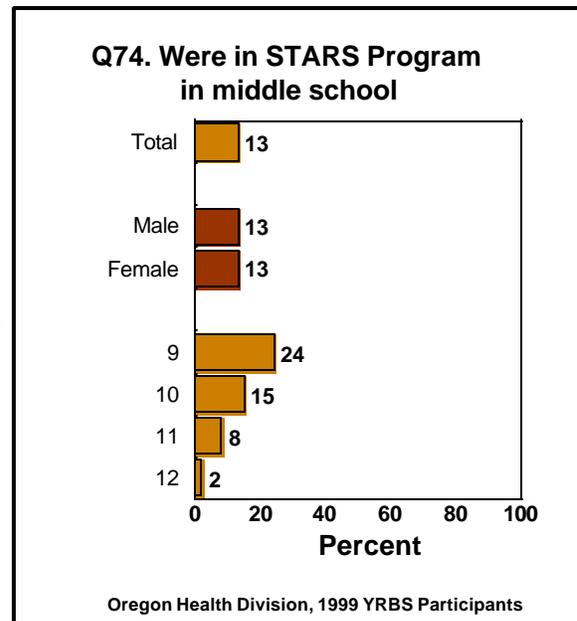
The next eight questions measure the prevalence and perceptions of sexual activity, number of sexual partners, age at first intercourse, alcohol and drug use, and condom use among Oregon high school students.

Engaging in early sexual activity puts a teenager at physical risk of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) as well as adverse effects on social and psychological development.<sup>1</sup> A large percentage of YRBS participants who reported having sex at an early age also reported some history of sexual abuse.<sup>2</sup> Risk factors such as a large number of sexual partners and an early age at first intercourse are associated with STDs.<sup>3</sup> Alcohol and drug use may influence initiation of sexual activity and unprotected sexual intercourse.<sup>3</sup>

## WHAT OREGON STUDENTS REPORTED

***Q74. Many middle school students take the STARS (Students Today Aren't Ready for Sex) classes. These classes teach refusal skills to limit sexual involvement. Were you in a STARS class in middle school?***

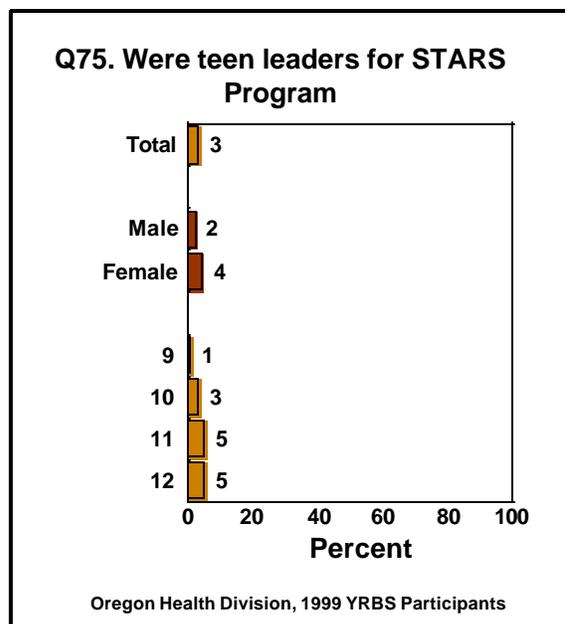
Thirteen percent of all 1999 YRBS participants were in a STARS class in middle school. The STARS program began in 1995 as a pilot project in four Multnomah County middle schools. By the 1998/1999 school year, a version of the STARS program was in 400 middle schools in 31 of Oregon's 36 counties. Male and female students participated in STARS in equal proportions. The large decrease for older students is due to the fact that STARS was not yet widely implemented when they were in middle school.



**Q75. Many high school students become teen leaders for the STARS program. Were you ever a teen leader for the STARS program?**

Three percent of the Oregon 1999 YRBS high school students reported that they were teen leaders for the STARS program.

Twice as many females as males (4 vs. 2 percent) reported having been teen leaders. As grade increased, more students (5 vs. 1 percent) reported having been teen leaders for STARS.

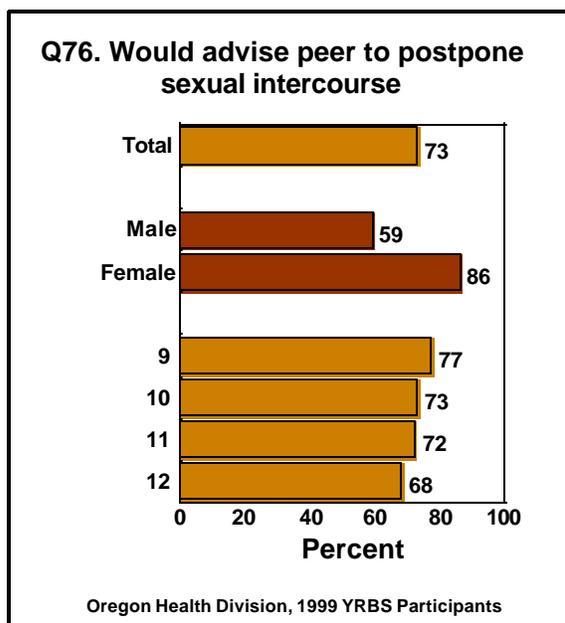


**Q76. If a classmate, your same age and sex, asked you for your advice about whether to start having sexual intercourse, what would you probably say?**

Seventy-three percent of Oregon 1999 YRBS participants reported that they would advise a classmate of the same age and sex to wait, either until married or until they were older, before beginning to have sexual intercourse.

Female students were one and one-half times more likely than male students (86 vs. 59 percent) to advise waiting before having sexual intercourse. Slightly more students advised waiting until older in general (rather than waiting until married).

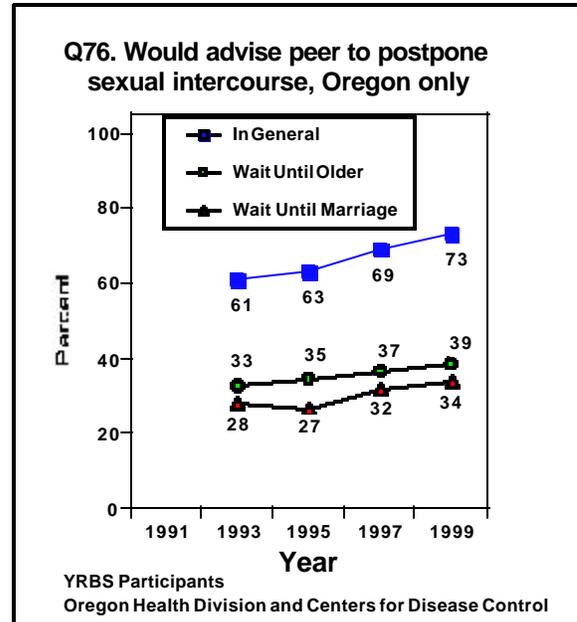
The proportion of students advising postponement of sexual intercourse dropped by almost 12 percent from 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. However, among those students who advised postponing sex, the proportion of students advising to wait until married, versus waiting until they are older, increased by grade (43% of 9<sup>th</sup> graders versus 50% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders).



## Q76. DATA TRENDS

The percentage of students who say they would advise their friends and peers to postpone sexual intercourse has increased by 20 percent since 1993.

Of those who advised postponement, a little less than half reported that they would advise to wait until marriage, while a little over half opted for the more general statement, "wait until you are older." These proportions have remained fairly consistent over time.

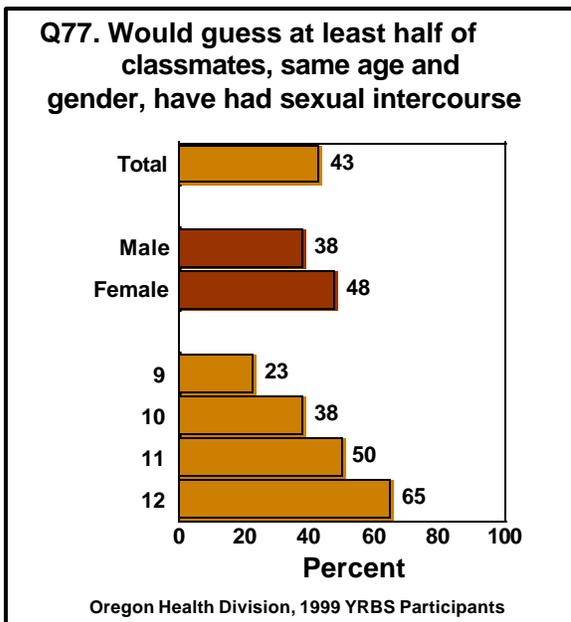


## Q77. What percentage of your classmates, your same age and sex, have had sexual intercourse? (What) would you guess?

Forty-three percent of Oregon 1999 YRBS participants guessed at least half of their classmates of the same age and gender have had sexual intercourse.

Fewer male students than females (38 vs. 48) believed that at least half of their classmates had ever been sexually active. 12<sup>th</sup> graders were almost three times more likely than 9<sup>th</sup> graders to believe that at least half of their peers had engaged in sex.

In 1997, virtually the same percentage of students guessed that at least half of their classmates were sexually active.

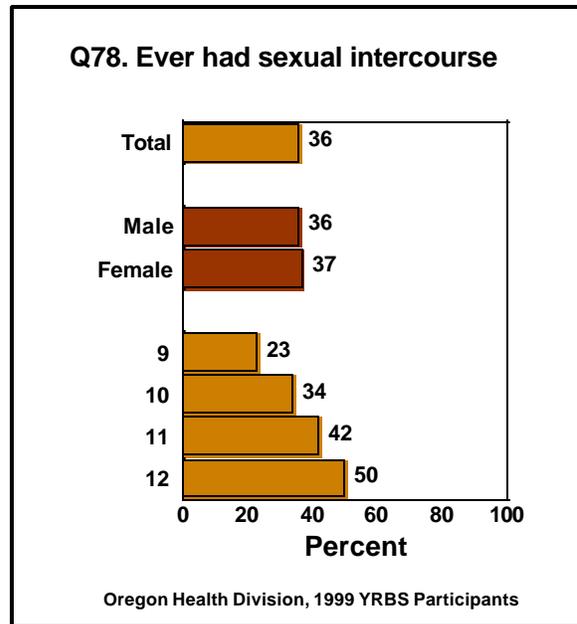


### Q78. Have you ever had sexual intercourse?

Thirty-six percent of Oregon 1999 YRBS participants reported that they had ever had sexual intercourse.

There was little gender difference in those reporting that they had been sexually active. However, the proportion of students who had ever been sexually active doubled between 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Among 12<sup>th</sup> graders, slightly more females than males (52% vs 48%) reported ever having had sexual intercourse.

Oregon's 1997 YRBS showed similar patterns by grade and gender.

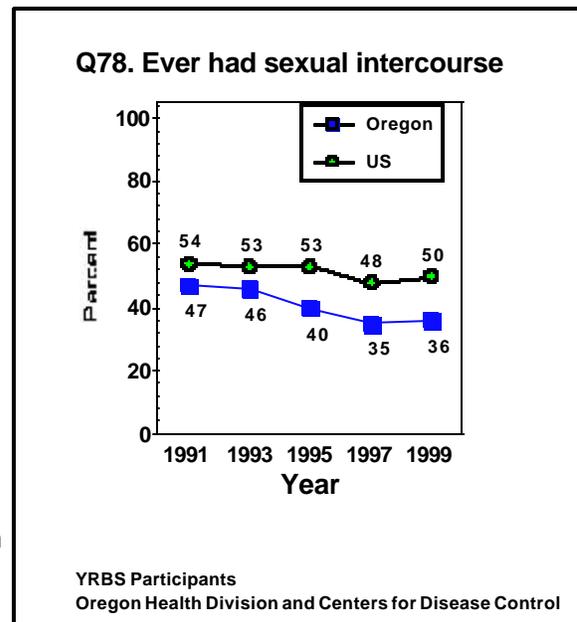


### Q78. DATA TRENDS

The proportion of sexually active teenagers has been dropping both statewide and nationally. The Oregon percentage has decreased by 23 percent from 1991 to 1999. Nationally, data indicate a 7 percent decrease from 1991 to 1999.

Reporting of sexual activity in the national survey data showed less of a difference between grades, but more difference between genders.

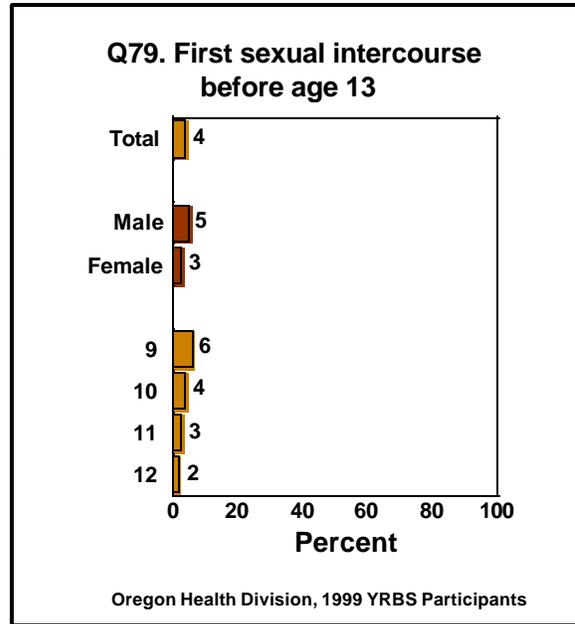
Nationwide, the proportion of sexually active teens increased 66 percent by grade; 39 percent of 9<sup>th</sup> graders versus 65 percent of 12<sup>th</sup> graders said they had been sexually active. Among all grades in the national study, slightly more males than females (52 vs 48 percent) had ever engaged in sex.<sup>4</sup>



**Q79. How old were you when you had sexual intercourse for the first time?**

Four percent of Oregon 1999 YRBS participants had sexual intercourse for the first time prior to age 13. Of those who had sex prior to age thirteen, 39 percent also reported some form of sexual abuse.

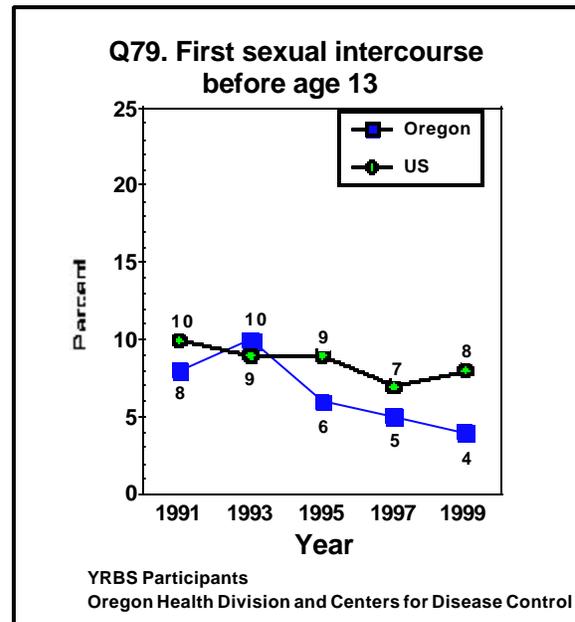
More males than females (5 vs 3 percent) engaged in sexual intercourse for the first time prior to age 13. As grade level increased, the percentage of students who reported having intercourse before age 13 decreased by one third. However, this decrease may simply reflect attrition patterns in school attendance. More students have left school by 12<sup>th</sup> grade than at the beginning of high school, and studies indicate that a substantial percentage of those who leave school may be among those most at risk for a variety of health-related behaviors.<sup>5</sup>



**Q79. DATA TRENDS**

Both in Oregon and nationwide, the proportion of students reporting early initiation of sexual activity has exhibited a downward trend. The Oregon percentage has decreased by 50 percent since 1991; nationally the decrease is about 20 percent.

Because the age range of YRBS participants includes students younger than age 15, the national reporting uses age 13 in analysis of early initiation of sexual intercourse. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the US Healthy People 2000 objective 5.4 is to reduce the percentage of adolescents who have engaged in sexual intercourse prior to age 15, and age 17. Data from the Oregon 1999 survey indicates that among respondents aged 15-17, the state's female YRBS participants meet the objective (15 percent), whereas 16 percent of male participants aged 15-17 have engaged in sexual intercourse prior to age 15.<sup>2</sup>

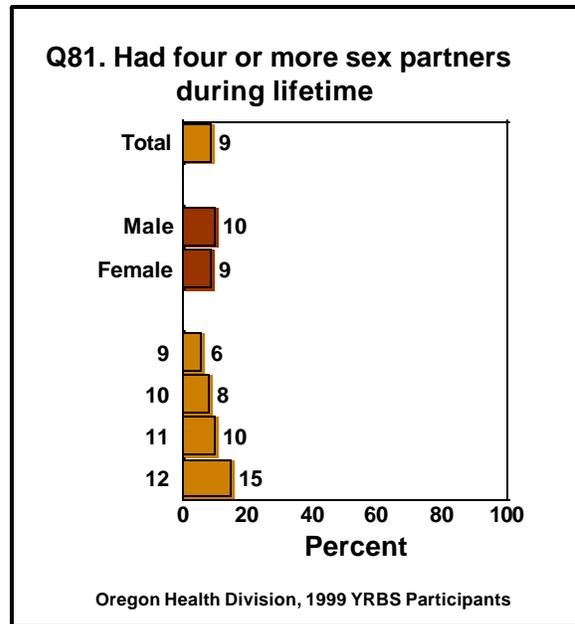


**Q81. During your life, with how many people have you had sexual intercourse?**

The CDC uses proportion of youth who have had sex with four or more partners as one of the measures for risk of STDs and other health risks.<sup>4</sup> Nine percent of Oregon 1999 YRBS participants have had sexual intercourse with four or more people during their lifetime.

Slightly more male than female students (10 vs. 9 percent) reported this level of multiple sexual partners in their lifetime. Nationally, however, the difference between male and female students was more pronounced (19 vs. 13 percent).

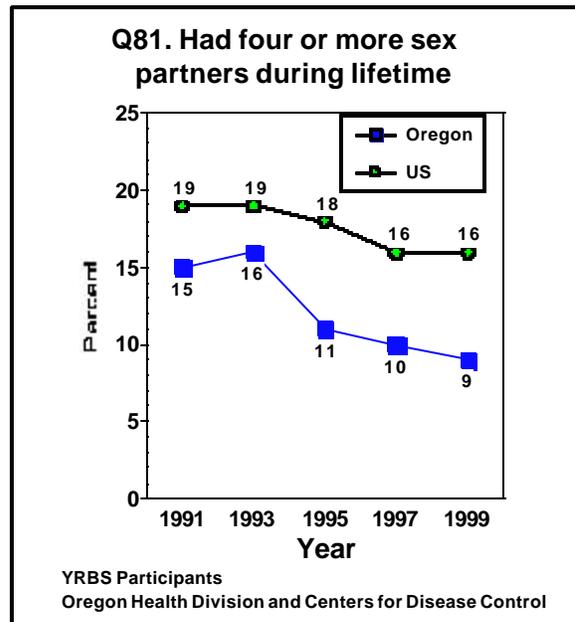
The proportion of Oregon students reporting four or more lifetime sex partners more than doubled from 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade.



**Q81. DATA TRENDS**

Fewer Oregon teenagers reported multiple sexual partners than students nationally. The trend shows that Oregon percentages have been consistently lower than the national average.

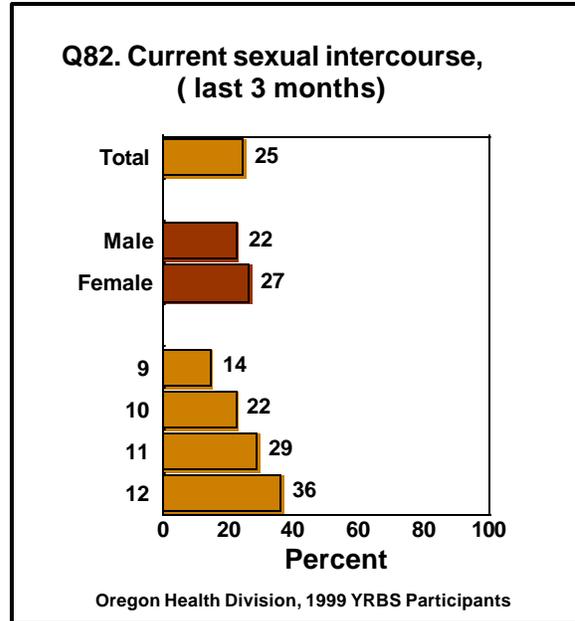
Since 1991, the proportion of Oregon students reporting multiple sex partners has decreased by 40 percent. Nationwide, this proportion has decreased less dramatically, by 16 percent.



**Q82. During the past 3 months, with how many people did you have sexual intercourse?**

Current sexual activity is measured by student reports regarding whether they have had sexual intercourse with one or more partners during the three months prior to taking the survey. Twenty-five percent of all Oregon 1999 YRBS participants reported having current sexual activity.

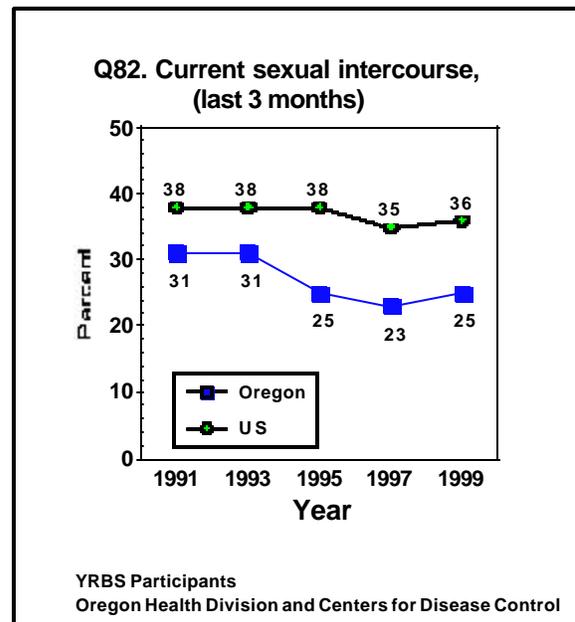
The proportion of students who reported being currently sexually active was similar among males and females, but increased by over one and a half times between ninth and twelfth grades.



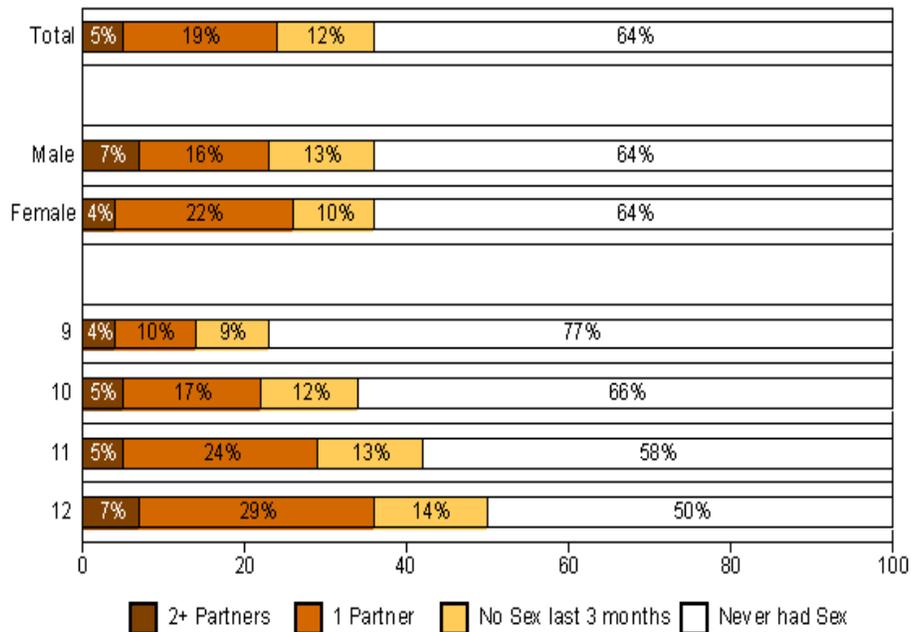
**Q82. DATA TRENDS**

The proportion of students reporting current sexual activity—sexual intercourse in the three months preceding the survey—has decreased in Oregon by 19 percent since 1991. Nationally, no significant decrease has been found.<sup>4</sup>

Nationally, 72 percent of the students who had ever had sex reported being currently sexually active.<sup>4</sup> Among Oregonian students who ever had sexual intercourse, 67 percent reported current sexual activity. This proportion is similar to those who reported current sexual activity in the 1997 Oregon YRBS (66 percent of those who ever had sex).



### Q82. Sexual Activity in past 3 months



Oregon Health Division, 1999 YRBS Participants

The table above shows the proportion of survey respondents by number of sex partners (if any) in the past three months. More males than females (7 versus 4 percent) reported being currently or recently sexually active with more than one partner. The proportion of students reporting current sexual activity increased by 61 percent from ninth to twelfth grade, with the bulk of the increase occurring among those reporting one current or recent sex partner. Those who reported having ever had sex but being currently abstinent also increased by 36 percent between ninth and twelfth grade. Proportions in all categories are similar to those reported in 1997.

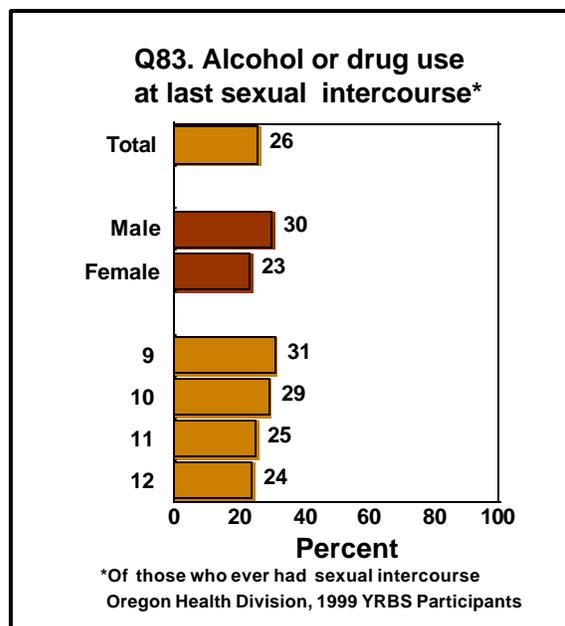
*Of those who ever had sexual intercourse, almost one third (33%) were currently abstinent. More males than females (36 versus 28 percent) were currently abstinent. However, female students who were currently sexually active were much more likely than their male counterparts (90 versus 63 percent) to have had only one recent sexual partner. Over three quarters of Oregon's currently sexually active students reported having only one sexual partner during the three months preceding the survey.*

Among those who were 17 or younger, 33 percent of ever sexually active teens who reported being currently abstinent. This proportion was the same as that of the total YRBS respondent population, and compares to the Healthy People 2000 goal for current abstinence (at least 40%).

**Q83. Did you drink alcohol or use drugs before you had sexual intercourse the last time?** [Of YRBS participants who have ever had sexual intercourse]

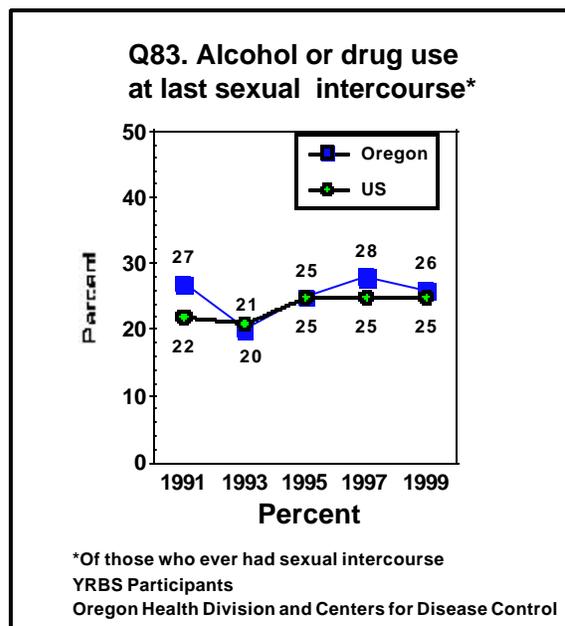
Twenty-six percent of sexually active 1999 YRBS participants drank alcohol or used drugs before their last sexual intercourse.

More males than females (30 vs. 23 percent) drank alcohol or used drugs before the last time they had intercourse. More Oregon female students than those nationwide drank or used alcohol before sex (23 vs. 19 percent).<sup>4</sup> As grade level increased, 23 percent fewer students reported using alcohol or other drugs before intercourse.



### Q83. DATA TRENDS

Slightly more Oregon students than those nationwide report alcohol and drug use prior to sexual activity. It is unclear whether there has been an upward trend in the Oregon data, or whether the proportion has remained about the same. National data, however, exhibits no significant change in the percent of students using alcohol or drugs prior to sexual activity.<sup>4</sup>



## WHAT OREGON STUDENTS WROTE

### **Advising peers about whether to have sex:**

"I would probably tell them that they need to find out from themselves if they are ready and then tell them I am waiting until after marriage."

"I would ask them if they liked the person a lot and then if it really, truly felt right then do it – but use protection."

"I wouldn't answer any. I would ask them if they are ready to take on the responsibilities of sex, like getting pregnant. If they are ready, age has a part in sex but not a huge part."

"On question 76, I don't like the responses. I would tell my friend that if they were ready and loved their partner to do what they wanted. I would not say that they were too young or should wait because it is that person's choice."

"I think people should at least wait until they are legal to have sex or until they are ready. And it should be with only one partner."

### **Other comments:**

"There is so much emphasis and pressure as teenagers to become sexually active. Not so much intercourse but other things as well. I don't really know where anyone would start to deal with the problems with peer pressure/sexual activity. But it's just a suggestion to think about."

"I was sexually involved once this year. It was not forced, but I was drunk and wouldn't have done it had I been sober."

"The second person I had intercourse with was intoxicated and so was I....I was kinda talked into it, I really did not want to!"

"Sex isn't a bad thing with one partner that you absolutely love."

"Some people have had sex because it was forced. (These) questions about the topic overlook that."

"We need programs to keep teens away from having sex."

"I think this survey is a very good thing. I also think more schools need sex-ed classes. There is a lot of sex, drugs, and alcohol going on in our school, but it is hard to prevent it."

"My healthy lifestyle comes from sports and having STARS and leadership classes and my parents and I."

"I know I (and many of my friends) would be more sexually active as well as experiment with drugs if I did not have the FFA (Future Farmers of America) program."