



Community College Health Study

What is the state of the sexual and relationship health of community college students?

Welcome back to the Community College Health Study newsletter! As part of this newsletter, you're receiving the inside scoop on the latest data and updates. We'll be sending regular updates, so stay tuned.

In the [first newsletter](#), we provided a preliminary overview of the college campuses and students who are participating in the Community College Health Study. In this newsletter, we provide more detail about the sexual and relationship health of participants when they first joined the study, before participating in any study activities. These data, collected in 2021-2023, paint an important portrait of the current trends in sexual health of young U.S. community college students. As a result, they pinpoint opportunities to improve community college students' sexual health outcomes (e.g., STI testing, contraception use) – reducing the likelihood that students will experience an unplanned pregnancy or STIs.

Are your colleagues interested in receiving study updates? If so, they can complete the form below to receive future newsletters!

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Community College Sexual Health

The baseline survey sample included 1,678 community college students aged 18-20 years old. Participants attended 34 community college campuses across 17 states in the US.

Why is this sample size different than the one in the first newsletter?

While 1,678 students participated in the baseline survey, 1,647 students remained involved in the study after baseline—the rest did not complete future study activities and, thus, were not included in the first newsletter.

Sexual and Gender Identities of Community College Students



60% women
33% men
6% non-binary



61% Heterosexual
15% Bisexual
5% Pansexual
4% Gay/Lesbian
4% Questioning
3% Asexual
2% Queer
2% Another sexual identity/prefer to self-describe

Students' Sexual Health Behaviors and Intentions to Engage in Healthy Decision Making



44% are in a relationship

Sexual Activity

58% have had oral sex

54% have had vaginal sex

16% have had anal sex

Students reported their current sexual health behaviors—like condom use and STI testing—as well as their intentions to engage in healthy behaviors in the future. In the survey, only sexually active students received questions about current sexual behaviors, while all students responded to questions about their future intentions. Items related to intentions are key for assessing students' preparedness for making healthy decisions in the future, especially among those who are not currently sexually active but may soon decide to have sex.

Contraception

On average, students report CURRENTLY using condoms^a...

RARELY during oral sex
RARELY during anal sex
SOMETIMES during vaginal sex

Students **RARELY** use dual contraception (i.e., condoms and another form of birth control) during vaginal sex

On average, students felt that IN THE FUTURE they were^b...

UNLIKELY to use a condom or dental dam during oral sex
LIKELY to use a condom during vaginal sex
LIKELY to use contraception during vaginal sex

^a Students responded to questions about their engagement in these sexual behaviors on the following scale: Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Always

^b Students responded to questions about their intentions to engage in these sexual behaviors on the following scale: Not at all likely, Unlikely, Likely, Extremely Likely

Communication

Among sexually active students, only...

52% have communicated with a doctor about sexual health

On average, students report that they^a...

SOMETIMES communicate with partners about sexual health before sex

On average, students felt that IN THE FUTURE it was^b...

LIKELY they would communicate with their partner about sexual health
LIKELY they would communicate with a doctor about sex

^a Students responded to questions about their engagement in these sexual behaviors on the following scale: Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Always

^b Students responded to questions about their intentions to engage in these sexual behaviors on the following scale: Not at all likely, Unlikely, Likely, Extremely Likely

Sexually Transmitted Infections

Among sexually active students, just...

42% have been tested for STIs

Among students who have been tested...

11% have ever been diagnosed with an STI

Among this large group of community college students, we found that many sexually active community college students are NOT consistently engaging in protective sexual health behaviors like condom use, STI testing, and communication. Evidence supports that these behaviors reduce the risk of STIs and unintended pregnancy. For example, STI testing allows for early detection and treatment and prevents further STI transmission.¹ Communicating with partners before sex can foster transparency about STI status and lead young people to establish a plan for using protection. Talking with a health care provider about sexual health can guide young people to the most appropriate STI tests, vaccines, and other recommendations for their lifestyles.^{2,3}

Sexual Health Disparities

Among community college students, there were some differences in sexual health behaviors and intentions between different groups.



A note on terminology:

In this newsletter, we use the term LGB+ to refer to participants that identified their sexual orientation as gay or lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, queer, asexual, or questioning.

- **STI testing** was less common among heterosexual men compared to heterosexual women, LGB+ women, and LGB+ non-binary groups.⁴
- Heterosexual women were less likely than heterosexual men to have **used a condom** the last time they had vaginal sex.⁵
- Heterosexual women reported less frequent **condom use during anal sex** compared to LGB+ men and LGB+ women and less frequent **condom/dental dam use during oral sex** compared to LGB+ men.⁵
- Men (including heterosexual and LGB+ men) reported lower rates of **communication with a doctor** about sexual health than heterosexual women, LGB+ women, and LGB+ non-binary people.⁶
- Men (including heterosexual and LGB+ men) reported lower intentions to **communicate with a partner** about sex than heterosexual and LGB+ women.⁷

Key Takeaways

Findings indicate that many young community college students do not sufficiently engage in healthy sexual behaviors like STI testing, contraception use, and communication with partners and providers.

As a result, students may be at increased risk for STIs and unplanned pregnancy, which can impact their physical and mental health and make it more difficult to achieve their academic and career goals.

These findings point to a clear need to improve healthy sexual behaviors among community college students. Importantly, efforts are needed to reduce disparities between gender and sexual identity groups, such as through [tailored programming or targeted outreach](#).⁸

Community colleges have a key opportunity to implement **programming** that educates students and cultivates the skills they need to engage in healthy sexual decision making.⁹ Further, colleges are poised to connect students to sexual and relationship health resources and services (e.g., STI testing).

Feedback

Email CCHStudy@iRTinc.us with questions, comments, or requests for future newsletter content!

Next Steps

Want more information?

Find more information about the Community College Health Study on our website.

[Visit Our Website](#)

Want to share this information with other stakeholders at your campus?

Click the button below to visit our study website where you can find a downloadable email template and flyer. Feel free to use these materials to share findings presented in this newsletter at your next staff meeting, with your college listserv, or on other relevant platforms. If you decide to share this information, please cite the information using the following: **Brewington, M., Dodson, C., Evans-Paulson, R., Porter, E., Scull, T., Stump, K., and The Community College Health Study Team (2023). Community College Health Study Newsletter, 3rd edition. <https://cchealthstudy.com>**

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Resources

1. "How You Can Prevent Sexually Transmitted Diseases." ([CDC, 2023](#))
2. "How to Start the Conversation with Your Healthcare Provider and Partner(s)." ([CDC, 2022](#))
3. "Talk. Test. Treat." ([CDC, 2023](#))
4. "CDC Fact Sheet: Information for Teens and Young Adults: Staying Healthy and Preventing STDs." ([CDC, 2022](#))
5. "Contraception." ([CDC, 2023](#))
6. "How to Talk to a Doctor About STD Testing." ([CDC, 2022](#))
7. "STD Testing: Conversation Starters." ([U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022](#))
8. "Not Up for Debate: LGBTQ People Need and Deserve Tailored Sexual and Reproductive Health Care." ([Guttmacher Institute, 2020](#))
9. "Reducing STI Cases: Young People Deserve Better Sexual Health Information and Services." ([Guttmacher Institute, 2020](#))

Meet the People Behind This Newsletter



Micaela Brewington

Lead Author and Public Health Intern

Micaela Brewington is a Master of Public Health student with a concentration in health behavior at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She has several years of experience conducting health communications research on a wide variety of topics including sexual and relationship health, vaccination, and substance use. Her main interests in public health include developing and evaluating programs aimed at promoting healthy behaviors and improving health literacy.



Christina Dodson, PhD

Co-Investigator

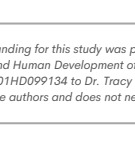
Dr. Dodson has conducted rigorous research on health communication and behavior with a focus on the sexual and relationship health of adolescents and young adults. She has been a co-investigator on several grants from the NIH to develop and test theory-based interventions to promote adolescent health. Her work has been published in numerous academic journals and presented at national and international conferences. She received her doctorate in mass communication and a certificate in interdisciplinary health communication from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and holds a master's degree in communication management from the University of Southern California.



Reina Evans-Paulson, PhD

Senior Author and Project Director

Dr. Evans-Paulson conducts research related to adolescent and young adult health with a focus on implementation and evaluation of sexual health interventions, parent and family influences on adolescent sexuality, and sexual communication. Dr. Evans-Paulson has published in esteemed peer-reviewed journals such as JAMA Pediatrics, Journal of Sex Research, and Pediatrics. She received her doctorate in applied social and community psychology from North Carolina State University.



Elizabeth Porter

Content Marketing Specialist

Elizabeth Porter studied communication media, rhetoric, and professional writing at North Carolina State University, and she is passionate about creating content that is relevant, engaging, and helpful for others. She has experience in marketing, writing, social media management, web content creation, email design, and editing.

Tracy Scull, PhD

Senior Author and Principal Investigator

Over the past 16 years, Dr. Scull has conducted rigorous research on child, adolescent, and family health, with specific focus on promoting sexual health and preventing substance abuse. Dr. Scull has secured over 10 million dollars in federal funding for her research and has published her work in esteemed peer-reviewed journals such as Pediatrics, Developmental Psychology, and the Journal of American College Health. She holds a doctorate in developmental psychology from Duke University.

Katie Stump, PhD

Research Scientist/Statistician

Dr. Stump received her doctorate in developmental psychology from the University of Kansas and has expertise in the areas of child and adolescent social development and statistics. She has been a co-principal investigator and statistician on numerous NIH- and OJJDP-funded research and evaluation projects in the field of youth mentoring.

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