Abstinence Pledges Don't Protect Against STDs

Delaying first intercourse had no significant effect on sexually transmitted disease incidence.

BY MICHELE G. SULLIVAN
Mid-Atlantic Bureau

Teenagers who take a sexual abstinence pledge delay their sexual debut for a few years, but they have just as many sexually transmitted infections as nonpledgers, probably because they are more likely to engage in noncoital sex and aren't as likely to use a condom during any sexual activity.

Hannah Brückner, Ph.D., and Peter Bearman, Ph.D., said their findings might put a new spin on programs that stress abstinence as the only way to avoid STDs and pregnancy. "It is important to know that pledgers are more likely to engage in noncoital sex and pregnancy," said Brückner, who works at the Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Bearman, who works at Stanford University, New York. "But this does not negate the importance of condom use or other forms of prevention for adolescents who are engaging in noncoital sex."

"It is also important to know that pledgers are more likely to engage in noncoital sex but not vaginal sex," according to Bearman. "About 2% of nonpledgers fell into that group, compared with 13% of consistent pledgers and 7% of inconsistent pledgers. About 0.7% of nonpledgers reported anal sex but not vaginal sex, compared with 1.2% of pledgers."

Male pledgers delayed intercourse the longest, by age 25, 25% of consistent male pledgers were still virgins, compared with 7% of male inconsistent pledgers and 6% of nonpledgers. Male pledgers delayed intercourse the longest: by age 25, 25% of consistent male pledgers were still virgins, compared with 13% of inconsistent pledgers and 7% of nonpledgers. By age 21, 25% of female consistent pledgers were still virgins, compared with 16% of inconsistent pledgers and 6% of nonpledgers. Delaying first intercourse had no significant effect on STD incidence in the groups, however.

About 6.6% of nonpledgers, 6.4% of inconsistent pledgers, and 4.6% of the consistent pledgers tested positive for trichomoniasis, chlamydia, and/or gonorrhea. For HPV infection, the rates were 26.5% among nonpledgers, 28.9% among inconsistent pledgers, and 26.7% among consistent pledgers. Pledgers did have fewer sexual partners than nonpledgers (average of 1.5 partners vs. 2.4 partners), and were not exposed as long to STD risk. However, they were more likely to engage in noncoital sexual contact. About 3% of respondents reported oral sex but no vaginal sex. About 2% of nonpledgers fell into that group, compared with 13% of consistent pledgers and 5% of inconsistent pledgers. About 0.7% of nonpledgers reported anal sex but not vaginal sex, compared with 1.2% of pledgers.

About 1% of male nonpledgers reported anal, but not vaginal, sex, compared with 3% of male inconsistent pledgers and 4% of male consistent pledgers.

Condom use during these experiences was very low for all respondents: Only 4% reported using a condom during oral sex, and about 30% reported using one for anal sex.

"The combination of low condom use and overrepresentation of pledgers (in noncoital sex) provides some support for the hypothesis that this behavioral pattern is associated with greater than expected STD acquisition among pledgers, although the numbers are small and provide an insufficient basis from which to make inference," the authors said.

Risk of Sepsis Death Soars With Antibiotic Delays

BY JANE SALDOOF MacNEIL
Centering Winter

European cities appear to have a substantially increased risk of death if you get antibiotics by the second hour after onset of hypotension compared with the first hour—that and odds ratio continues to climb out to 36 hours," principal investigator Anand Kumar, M.D., said at a meeting sponsored by the Society of Critical Care Medicine.

"We investigated in Yale University, New Haven, Conn., and Columbia University, New York. The researchers extracted data from 2001 to 2002, during the third wave of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. During this wave, respondents were age 18-24 years. A total of 11,471 respondents provided urine samples for STD testing (chlamydia, gonorrhea, and trichomoniasis). An additional 3,317 sexually active female respondents were randomly selected for human papilloma virus (HPV) testing.

Pledges were established for all waves of the survey. Nonpledgers reported no abstinence pledge during any of the waves. Consistent pledgers reported pledging during all waves or pledging for the first time during wave 1. Inconsistent pledgers reported pledging during an early wave but not a subsequent wave.

Most of the group (80%) were nonpledgers. Only 7% were consistent pledgers; 13% were inconsistent pledgers. Consistent and inconsistent pledgers delayed their time to first coitus by several years, compared with nonpledgers. Among nonpledgers, 75% reported first intercourse by age 18. Inconsistent pledgers reached the 75th percentile by age 20, and consistent pledgers by age 24.

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