

## No fear? Condom use drops among Minnesota teens: 2013 could bring record high for STDs

Written by John Michaelson, Minnesota News Connection  
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The teen birth rate is down in Minnesota, but another important concern about adolescent sexual health is emerging. Jill Farris with [Teenwise Minnesota](#) said condom use by teens has plateaued nationwide - and statewide, it's actually on the decline.

"A lot of other trends seem to be going in a positive direction when it comes to young people and their sexual health, but this particular trend is a little bit troubling in terms of going in a direction that we would, of course, like to see in a different direction," Farris said.

According to the latest data, 61 percent of Minnesota 12th graders report using a condom in their last sexual encounter - but that figure has dropped about 2.5 percent over three years. In the meantime, the number of STDs in the state continues to climb, with a record last year of more than 21,000 cases.

Farris said one of the reasons for the decline in condom use is that young people may not have as much fear, since HIV is no longer considered a 'death sentence,' and some education efforts around protection have fallen off.

"That kind of has gone away, and so a lot of young people maybe don't really see the problem or the big deal with STIs. They think it's something that can be easily treated or managed," she said. "In some ways that's true - but we also know there are some pretty devastating health consequences for young people if they don't get treated."

Farris noted that another reason for the drop in condom use may be the advent of long-lasting, effective contraception such as IUD's and implants. There's also the issue that not all STDs present symptoms.

"Young people maybe sometimes wrongfully assume that they do not have any infection or that their partner doesn't, because they don't have any symptoms," she explained. "That's something I think we need to do a better job of educating young people on."

Despite less condom use and more STDs, the teen birth rate in Minnesota has been dropping steadily for years and is now at its lowest point on record.

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More information is available at <http://teenwisemn.org> .