

Birth Rates Increased in Schools That Gave Out Condoms

When I was an undergraduate, I recall a few of my roommates going to the campus health department and returning with (literally) a garbage bag full of condoms. (No one in our house was exactly a Casanova, but hey – they were free.)

That was nearly 20 years ago. Today the discussion has changed.

[Earlier this month](#), the chairman of American Academy of Pediatrics, Dr. David Kaplan, said it's time to get serious about getting condoms to high school teens.

His timing was, shall we say, poor. Two weeks later, a pair of Notre Dame researchers [published this bombshell](#): schools that distributed condoms to teens saw fertility rates *increase*.

Via Christina Cauterucci [at Slate](#):

Most previous studies have shown that access to free contraception decreases teen birth rates, but this is the first robust study of condom-only programs. Researchers Kasey Buckles and Daniel Hungerman of the University of Notre Dame found that teen births rose 10 percent at schools that gave out free condoms to students.

The study distinguished between schools with free condoms that provided mandatory counseling about proper condom use and schools that gave out the condoms with no instruction. The authors tracked pregnancy rates before and after the condom programs were introduced in each school, and they compared these numbers to the pregnancy rates at schools that had no condom program at all and the pregnancy rates among young women aged 20 to 24 in the same areas as the school. This allowed them to control for the possibility that broader

societal shifts were driving the rising pregnancy rates in the schools that offered free condoms.

So what went wrong? Cauterucci seems to lean towards the idea that students were not given proper instruction on how prophylactics work.

Michael J. New, writing at National Review, [posits](#) an alternative theory:

[T]here is a possibility that condom-distribution programs resulted in more teen sexual activity. Interestingly, the study finds sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) increased in counties with condom-distribution programs. While this provides evidence that condom-distribution programs encouraged sexual risk taking – the authors warn that this finding has to be interpreted cautiously.

So, just to be clear, the most robust academic research we have strongly suggests that giving condoms to students leads to higher fertility rates and (apparently) more STDs. Meanwhile, the chairman of the American Academy of Pediatrics is recommending we expand the distribution of condoms to teens. Does anyone else's head hurt?

Nearly 20 years ago, when my roommates returned from the health department with a bag full of rubbers, I recall thinking that schools might be sending young people a dangerous message.

The social science now *seems* to support this view. (Confession: I didn't pay the \$5 to read the study in its entirety.)

Is it time to rethink the policy of giving condoms to teens?