

Preventing Unintended Pregnancy Among Youth

Fact Sheet

Unintended pregnancy is an important issue for people of all ages, but there are special risks and concerns for adolescents. Teen pregnancy poses a serious health risk for both the mother and the baby. The infants of teen mothers are more likely to be underweight or die in the first month of life than the infants of older mothers. In addition to the medical issues, teen parents are more likely to live in poverty than their peers.

Teens who become pregnant are generally not married and usually did not intend to be parents at such a young age. Approximately 4,000 15 to 17 year-old girls in Tennessee become pregnant each year. Because many teens have faced pregnancy scares or been pregnant themselves, unintended pregnancy is an important adolescent issue.

Teen pregnancy rates are much higher in the United States than in many other developed countries-- twice as high as in Great Britain or Canada, and approximately four times that in France and Sweden.

1 out of 4 teenage mothers in the U.S. have a second child within 2 years of their first.

The more that parents are involved in their children's lives in a positive way, the less likely their child is to become one of these statistics.

Why does it matter?

- Most teens don't want to be teen parents. Compared to their peers who have children later, teen parents are:
 - More likely to have low birth-weight children who will suffer from poor health and development.
 - More likely to have low family incomes, live in poverty and receive public assistance.
 - At increased risk of substance abuse, intimate partner violence, maternal depression and divorce or separation.

What do youth need?

No single approach to teen pregnancy prevention is appropriate for all adolescents in all circumstances and in every community. It is clear, however, that there is demonstrated success when teens have:

A range of choices – All adolescents need sexuality education that teaches them refusal skills and gives them up-to-date information about contraceptives and sexually transmitted infections before they are sexually active. The Institute of Medicine found that “sexuality education programs that provide information on both abstinence and contraceptive use neither encourage the onset of sexual intercourse nor increase the frequency of intercourse among adolescents...programs that provide both messages appear effective in delaying the onset of sexual intercourse and encouraging contraceptive use once sexual activity has begun, especially among younger adolescents.”

Strong emotional attachments – Teens who are close to their parents are less likely to be sexually active early on.

Parents’ advice – About 3 out of 4 adolescents 15 to 17 years old say that they have learned “some” or “a lot” on sexual health from their parents. Parents need to stress that there are consequences to sex besides pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections including the impact on a teen’s emotional development, family life and future goals.

Contraception – About 8 out of 10 sexually active adolescents, 15 to 17 years old, say they use condoms regularly, but more than 40% of high school students say they did not use a condom at last sexual intercourse. A sexually active teen couple that does not use contraception has about an 85% chance of pregnancy within 1 year.

Some Facts about Tennessee Youth

- Tennessee's 2006 teen pregnancy rate among 10–17 year olds was at a record low of 13.7. This means that out of every 1000 girls between the ages of 10–17 in Tennessee, almost fourteen became pregnant in 2006, for a total of 4,378 pregnant teens.
- In 2006, 3,552 or 11.1% of Tennessee’s adolescents aged 10–17 gave birth. Among this population, 607 or 13.9% had a previous pregnancy, 400 or 11.3% had low birth weight babies, and 3,209 or 90.3% were unwed.

Additional Resources for Information

Tennessee Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program Local County Health Department
1-877-461-8277 See Telephone Directory

National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy State Hotline for Youth
www.TEENPREGNANCY.ORG 1-800-255-4936