



Teen Pregnancy

Although teenage pregnancy and births in the U.S. have declined since the 1980's, they are still high. They are worrisome because teen mothers and their babies face increased risks to their health, and increased obstacles to their success in the future.

- About 425,000 or 11 percent of all U.S. births are to teens (ages 15 to 19) each year. One third of these teenage births are to girls ages 17 or less. Each year in the U.S. about 7000 births are to girls who are age 14 or less.
- About 8 percent of teenage girls become pregnant. Half of them deliver. About one quarter miscarry or have a stillbirth, and about one quarter abort their pregnancies. A bright side is that, since the 1980's, teen pregnancy is down about 29%; teen births are down by 14%; and abortions in teens are down by 48%.

Teen pregnancy puts both mother and baby at risk

- Teens are less likely to gain enough weight during pregnancy. Low weight gain increases the risk of having a low-birthweight baby (less than 5½ pounds).
- Pregnant teens are more likely to smoke than older pregnant women. Smoking doubles a woman's risk of having a low-birthweight baby, and also increases the risk of pregnancy complications, premature birth and stillbirth. Low-birthweight babies may have organs that are not fully developed. This can lead to long term lung problems, bleeding in the brain, vision loss and serious intestinal problems.
- Pregnant teens are less likely to get early and regular prenatal care. As a result, pregnancy complications may go undetected with disastrous results for the mother or the baby.
- A teenage mother is at greater risk for pregnancy complications such as premature labor and delivery, anemia and high blood pressure. Each year

three million teens are affected by sexually transmitted diseases. These can cause permanent harm or even be fatal to mother or baby.

Other Consequences of Teenage Pregnancy

Life often is difficult for a teenage mother and her child.

- Teen mothers are more likely to drop out of high school.
- With her education cut short, a teenage mother may lack job skills, making it hard for her to find and keep a job. A teenage mother may become financially dependent on her family or on public assistance. Teen mothers are more likely to live in poverty.
- Teens may not have good parenting skills, or have the social support systems to help them deal with the stress of raising an infant.
- A child born to an unmarried teenage high school dropout is 10 times as likely as other children to be living in poverty at ages 8 to 12.

What can be done?

Encourage teens to abstain from sex or use birth control and condoms. Teach the risks of sex, such as sexually transmitted disease, pregnancy, and being emotionally hurt. Encourage achievement, long-term goals, outside interests and activities in teens, so that romance and sex don't become their only outlets. Teach teens, especially girls, to value themselves and be self-assertive, so they are more likely to be able to say no when under pressure.

When teens do get pregnant, give them support. Encourage them to get early and regular prenatal care; eat a nutritious and balanced diet; stop smoking (and avoiding secondhand smoke); stop drinking alcohol or using illicit drugs; and stay in school!

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