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TODAY'S EDITORIALS

## 2-prong plan to cut teen pregnancies

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***Our position: Vows of abstinence and sex-ed program are both needed to reduce unwed pregnancies.***

Fear of AIDS, welfare reform, improved contraception and abstinence vows have driven down teenage pregnancies. But teen births remain a significant problem.

Teen pregnancies cost the nation's taxpayers more than \$9 billion last year, according to estimates by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. Hoosiers' share was \$195 million.

A higher tax burden, however, is among the least of the consequences.

Babies born to teen mothers are more likely to suffer from low birth weight and die within the first year of life. They are twice as likely to be abused and suffer greater health and developmental problems.

Young mothers also are more apt to drop out of school, be on welfare, divorce, commit crimes and experience health problems, including hypertension and obesity, later in life.

Teen pregnancies and births to unwed mothers also perpetuate poverty.

According to Marion County Health Department figures, even as births among teenage mothers declined more than 16 percent from 1996 to 2005, overall births to unwed mothers of all ages increased 34 percent, a trend also seen nationally.

Advocating sexual abstinence reduces peer pressure among teens to have sex and is proven to delay the initiation of intercourse. But research also shows that youngsters exposed only to abstinence programs are less likely to use contraception if they stray from their vows than those also educated about birth control.

Meaningful discussions about responsible sex have to start at home and become a part of the conversation in churches, youth groups and throughout the culture.