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## Lower teen birthrate reduces child poverty

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A decadelong decline in teen birthrates helped stymie a double-digit growth rate in child poverty cases in 14 states and the District, a study says.

"National and state investments in teen pregnancy prevention pay huge dividends," said Sarah Brown, director of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, the agency that commissioned the study.

The decline in teen births between 1991 and 2002 means 1.1 million fewer births, the report concludes.

The campaign analyzed state data to see what would have happened if these births had not been avoided and estimated that overall child poverty would have grown by 8.3 percent and that more than 400,000 children would have been added to the poverty rolls.

Locally, the District would have seen a 21 percent increase in child poverty -- the highest in the nation -- without the decline in teen births, the campaign says. In addition, 14 states, including Maryland, would have seen increases of 10 percent or more in child poverty rates.

The campaign says that although everything must be done to support a child and its parents, "at the same time, the evidence is very clear that children born to teen mothers face a number of challenges in terms of health, education, repeating the cycle of teen pregnancy and more."

The goal, the report says, is to improve the well-being of children, families and communities by preventing teen pregnancy in the first place.

A separate study released by Child Trends says increases in abstinence and contraceptive use have helped lower teen birthrates from 62 births per 1,000 teenage girls in 1991 to 42 births per 1,000 girls in 2002.

As evidence of sexual abstinence, Child Trends researchers say in their latest "Facts at a Glance" report that more surveys find that two-thirds of teens don't think it is right for unmarried 16-year-olds to have sex. Studies also show higher rates of teen contraceptive use.

Abortion -- which also could lower teen birthrates -- is not seen as a factor because the number of teen abortions has dropped from 40 percent of all teen pregnancies in the mid-1980s to 29 percent in 2000, the Trends report says.

Other highlights of the Child Trends report:

- The portion of teen births that are out of wedlock has risen steadily -- from 69 percent in 1991 to 83 percent in 2003.



- The number of ?repeat? births has fallen steadily -- from 25 percent in 1991 to 20 percent in 2003.

- The number of births to girls younger than 15 has fallen steadily -- from 12,014 in 1991 to 6,665 in 2003.

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