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May 3rd, 2009

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## Mission To Reduce Teen Pregnancies

By Marian Wright Edelman

May 1st, 2009



Teen pregnancies on the rise again

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### [Child Watch Column]

After falling for many years, the teen pregnancy rate is again on the rise. According to a report released in March by the National Center for Health Statistics, the teen birth rate increased 5 percent between 2005 and 2007.

A 2007 Centers for Disease Control Youth Risk Behavior Survey reveals that the declines in teenage sexual activity and increases in teenage contraceptive use have come to a standstill.

Other studies that have grabbed headlines include a recent Rand Corporation report that showed teenagers who watch the most sexual content on TV are twice as likely to get pregnant or cause a pregnancy as teens who watch less.

Right now, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy reports that there are about 730,000 teen pregnancies and more than 400,000 teen births annually—that's the equivalent of the population of Oakland, California.

These statistics make May 6 all the more important. That's the day that hundreds of thousands of teenagers across the country will take part in the eighth annual National Day to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. Coordinated by the National Campaign and supported by over 150 national partners, including the Children's Defense Fund, this special day is meant to test what teenagers know about teen pregnancy and raise awareness about the facts—and to remind them that despite what they may think, "it can happen to them." The National Campaign hopes that after participating in the day, teenagers will stop, think and start making a personal commitment to avoid pregnancy.


According to the National Campaign, the teen pregnancy rate in the United States declined 38 percent between 1990 and 2004 (the most recent data available), and the teen birth rate declined 32 percent between 1991 and 2006. These lower rates of teen pregnancies and births occurred in every state and among all racial and ethnic groups.

The National Campaign found this was happening both because more teenagers were waiting longer before having sex and because more of those who were sexually active were consistently using contraception. Nevertheless, it's estimated that three in ten girls in the United States still get pregnant by age 20. For Black and Latino girls, the numbers are even higher: They estimate 51 percent of Black and 53 percent of Latino teenage girls become pregnant at least once before age 20.

The National Campaign cites a long list of consequences of teen pregnancy for both teen parents and their children. Some of their findings include: Pregnant teens are far less likely than adult women to receive timely and regular prenatal care, and their babies are more likely to be born prematurely and at low birthweight. They are twice as likely to suffer abuse and neglect.

Fewer than half of teen mothers age 17 and younger ever graduate from high school, and fewer than 2 percent earn a college degree by age 30. About one-fourth of teen mothers have a second child within 24 months, which makes it harder for them to finish school, keep a job or escape poverty. Eight out of ten

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fathers don't marry the teen mother of their child, and daughters of teenage mothers are more likely to become teen mothers themselves.

The Campaign found that teen childbearing in the United States costs taxpayers at least \$9.1 billion annually, largely stemming from the costs borne by the public for the health care, foster care and incarceration of their children.

These sobering statistics contain important news for parents of teens about how they can prevent pregnancies. The National Campaign found in a recent survey that nearly half of the teenagers polled say their parents influence their decisions about sex more than friends, the media or any other source. The same survey found 73 percent of adults and 56 percent of teenagers wished young people were getting more information about abstinence and contraception rather than just one or the other.

The National Campaign's programs and resources are designed to help get more information to both teens and parents, and the National Day to Prevent Teen Pregnancy is one important way to raise awareness—and hopefully encourage more conversation on the topic between parents and children at home.

Learn more by visiting the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy's website at [www.thenationalcampaign.org](http://www.thenationalcampaign.org)

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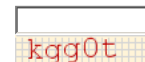
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