

# Why It Matters



## Teen Pregnancy and Other Health Issues

**T**een pregnancy can have negative health implications for both the mother and child. Of course, the health and health-related behavior of teen mothers before, during, and after pregnancy affect the health of the baby. Evidence suggests that babies born to teen mothers are at increased risk for specific health problems compared to babies born to older mothers. In addition to these personal costs, there are considerable costs to taxpayers associated with the public healthcare expenses of teen childbearing. Reducing teen pregnancy will not only improve the health of teens and their future children, it will also reduce some of the costs of public health services.

- Infants born to teen mothers are at increased risk of being born prematurely and at a low birthweight. This puts newborns at greater risk for infant death, respiratory distress syndrome, bleeding in the brain, vision loss, and serious intestinal problems.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Teen mothers are also more likely than mothers over the age of 25 to smoke during pregnancy, and often teen mothers are not at adequate pre-pregnancy weight and/or do not gain the appropriate amount of weight while pregnant.<sup>1</sup>
- Compared to older pregnant women, pregnant teens are far less likely to receive timely and consistent prenatal care.<sup>1</sup>
- Recent research indicates that while there is little difference in their child's health status as reported by teen mothers or by older mothers, the children of teen mothers are less likely to visit a medical care provider.<sup>3</sup> Teen mothers are also slightly more likely than similarly situated older mothers to report that their child has a chronic health condition.<sup>3</sup>

**The children of teen mothers are more likely to be born prematurely and at low birthweight compared to children of older mothers, which raises the probability of infant death, blindness, deafness, chronic respiratory problems, mental retardation, mental illness, cerebral palsy, dyslexia, and hyperactivity.**

- The children of teen mothers are more likely to depend on publicly-provided healthcare than the children of older mothers. In fact, 84 percent of healthcare expenses for children (ages 0-1) of teen mothers aged 18-19 are provided through public programs. Three-quarters of health care expenses for pre-school children of teen mothers 17 and younger are provided through public programs. This is compared to about half of the expenses for children born to mothers who were aged 20 or 21.<sup>3</sup>
- Despite their lower utilization of healthcare resources, the costs associated with providing health and medical care (primarily Medicaid and SCHIP) to the children of teen mothers is nearly \$2 billion each year.<sup>3</sup>
- Furthermore, approximately 72 percent of teen births in the United States are financed by Medicaid.<sup>4</sup>

Early pregnancy not only has health implications for the

children of young mothers, it has implications for the teens as well. Helping more teens to avoid or reduce risky sexual behavior (by either delaying sex or using contraception effectively) will help prevent teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including HIV/AIDS.

- Even though young people aged 15-24 represent 25 percent of the sexually active population, they account for about half of all new cases of STDs.<sup>5</sup>
  - The rate of reported Chlamydia cases among teens age 15-19 increased 20 percent between 2000 and 2004—the second highest rate among all age groups and nearly five times the overall rate.<sup>6</sup>
  - Although the rate of reported Gonorrhea cases decreased slightly between 2000 and 2004, the rate among teens remains second only to young adults aged 20-24 years and is almost four times the overall rate.<sup>6</sup>
  - Between 2001 and 2005, the estimated number of HIV/AIDS cases increased among teens aged 15-19. By the end of 2005, there were more than 6,300 reported AIDS cases among teens aged 13-19 in the United States.<sup>7</sup> In addition, in the 33 areas with confidential HIV infection reporting, an estimated 5,300 teenagers were reported to be living with HIV/AIDS in 2005.
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- Approximately half of all new HIV infections occur among young people aged 15-24 annually.<sup>8</sup>

## SOURCES

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