



Pennsylvania Coalition
To Prevent Teen Pregnancy

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THE STATE OF TEEN PREGNANCY IN PENNSYLVANIA

The last ten years have brought good news about teen pregnancy prevention in the United States. Both teen pregnancy and teen birth rates have declined, in all states and among all racial and ethnic groups—led by less sexual activity and better contraceptive use. Here in Pennsylvania, the rates declined by an even greater percentage than the national average. The two-pronged strategy of promoting abstinence and birth control is working. But despite the progress that has been made, many problems remain and much work still needs to be done. Below are a few key national facts followed by what we know about the current state of teen pregnancy and adolescent sexual health in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

- **The US still has the highest teen pregnancy rate in the developed world.** Thirty-four percent of teenage girls get pregnant at least once before age 20. Eighty percent of these pregnancies are unintended and eighty-one percent are to unmarried teens.
- **While overall rates of teen intercourse in the US have declined, the trends for very young teens are troubling.** One out of five teens has had intercourse before age 15. Seven percent have begun intercourse at age 12 or younger. One in five black teens has had intercourse before age 13.
- **Contraceptive use among teens, while improving, is still very inconsistent.** Condom use is far lower in the US than other developed countries. More than 1/3 of teens did not use a condom during their most recent intercourse. Communication about sexual and contraceptive decision-making is all too rare in teen relationships.

- **In the US, half of the 40,000 new cases of HIV each year are among youth aged 13-24, a rate of 50 new cases per day.**
- **Rates of many types of sexually transmitted infections are increasing.** It is estimated that there are nine million cases of STD each year among 15-24 year olds. At least half of sexually active youth will have contracted an STD by age 25. In Pennsylvania, rates of chlamydia have increased during the last five years among youth aged 15-24.
- **Teen pregnancy rates are still high among certain ethnic groups.** For example, the Hispanic/Latino community, the largest minority group in the nation, now has the highest teen birth rate. Three out of five Hispanic girls get pregnant as teenagers.
- **Many urban areas in Pennsylvania have very high teen birth ratios.** Chester, York, Harrisburg, and Lancaster, Reading, and McKeesport have ratios that are consistently more than double the state average.
- **Some rural counties in Pennsylvania have high teen birth ratios.** During the most recent three year period, Cameron, Greene, Fayette, and Tioga counties had ratios considerably higher than the state average.
- **Rates of oral sex, especially among middle school-aged teens, appear to be rising rapidly.** During focus groups conducted at PCPTP youth conferences, PA teens have told us that the pressure to have sex is most intense at the middle school level and that oral sex is common and casual. Many do not consider it to be sex.
- During focus groups, PA teens reported to us that **school sex education programs are woefully inadequate** at providing them with the knowledge and skills they need in order to protect themselves and to help them deal with the reality of sexual pressures in today's world. Programs vary greatly among schools, but generally, sex education is described as "too little, too late" and many important topics are not allowed to be discussed.
- **Due to a lack of research, we know very little about the sexual and contraceptive behavior of Pennsylvania teens.** For example, Pennsylvania is one of only eight states that does not participate in the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Without good data, policy decisions are more likely to be based on assumptions rather than scientific evidence.