



## A Look at Teen Pregnancy in New Mexico

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### THE NEWS IS GOOD AND BAD

**There is no single answer to the problem of teen pregnancy.** However, there is a part for everyone to play in helping young people delay pregnancy and parenthood until they are emotionally, financially, and psychologically ready for this important role. *May is National Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month* and a good time for reflecting on what has been happening recently both nationally and here in New Mexico.

Teen birth rates have enjoyed a decade long downward trend. The US teen birth rate is now 49.0 per 1,000 females ages 15-19.<sup>1</sup> New Mexico's teen birth rate declined during this period, following this national trend, from a high of 80.0 in 1991 to 65.5 for 2000, the most recent available data.<sup>2</sup> Still, the US has the highest teen birth rate among western industrialized countries, and New Mexico is the fifth highest in the US.<sup>2</sup> In some New Mexico counties teen births are more than twice the national rate.

### WHY SHOULD WE WORRY?

Teen birth data for 2000 witnessed a change: For the first time in almost a decade, eleven states saw increases in their teen birth rates. Although New Mexico was not one of these, it is still too early to say whether it could happen here. This news should stimulate us to keep up our efforts to reduce teen births in our state. We still have far to go in helping our teens achieve their full potential in life, because the consequences of pregnancy can be devastating for teens and their children:

- Only one-third of teen mothers complete high school.
- The children of teen mothers have lower birth weights, perform more poorly in school, and are at greater risk of abuse and neglect.

- The sons of teen mothers are 13% more likely to end up in prison.
- The daughters of teen mothers are 22% more likely to become teen mothers themselves<sup>3</sup>.

### WHAT'S WORKING?

We are at a critical point in teen pregnancy prevention. Based on growing knowledge about what works with teens and what does not, we can apply what we know about successful prevention approaches. Published in 2001, *Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy* explains the results from evaluations of curriculum-based programs, early childhood programs, clinic or school-based programs, community-wide initiatives, and youth development programs. For a copy of this report, contact New Mexico's Family Planning Program at (505) 476-8881. Here are some brief highlights:

- Despite the signals they sometimes send out, teens want to hear from their parents on this topic. They want to know what we think about love, marriage, and sex.
- The most effective sexuality education programs continue over an extended time (a semester or full school year) and address the social pressures that influence sexual behavior. Short, one-time programs are not effective.
- Helping teens avoid pregnancy sometimes has nothing to do with sex. For example, helping children set goals for the future, both short and long-term, and being an active part of helping them achieve those goals is a critical part of preventing teen pregnancy.

In honor of Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month in New Mexico, here are just a few ways we and our communities can take part in teen pregnancy prevention efforts--this May and throughout the year:

1. As parents, stay involved in our teen's life and talk with her or him.
  - Communicate early and often about our own values and attitudes.
  - Know what our kids are watching, reading, and listening to.
  - Discourage early, frequent, and steady dating.
  - Know our children's friends and their families.
  - Express love, affection, and respect for our children. Praise them for their accomplishments.

- Support our children in mastering new skills, as these help them build their self-confidence and self-esteem.
2. Contact the media and ask for coverage of positive role models for teens and the reality of sexual risk-taking.
  3. Talk with our children's school about offering more than just sex or abstinence education. Volunteer to oversee an after school or weekend activity for students<sup>5</sup>.

**SOME ON-LINE RESOURCES ON ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY PREVENTION:**

- **National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy:** [www.teenpregnancy.org](http://www.teenpregnancy.org)
- **Talking with Kids about Tough Issues:** [www.talkingwithkids.org](http://www.talkingwithkids.org)
- **Kids Health:** [www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)
- **Campaign for Our Children:** [www.cfoc.org](http://www.cfoc.org)

**NEW MEXICO RESOURCES ON TEEN PREGNANCY PREVENTION:**

- Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention, Family Planning Program, New Mexico Department of Health, (505) 476-8881
- Abstinence Education Program, New Mexico Department of Health, (505) 827-1630

- The New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition, (505) 254-8737, [www.flash.net/nmtp](http://www.flash.net/nmtp)

For more information, please contact Sophia Thomas, Family Planning Program, (505) 476-8881 or email: [stthomas@doh.state.nm.us](mailto:stthomas@doh.state.nm.us)

Sources:

- <sup>1</sup> Teen Pregnancy: Trends and Lessons Learned. The Alan Guttmacher Institute. [http://www.agi-usa.org/pubs/ib\\_1-02.html](http://www.agi-usa.org/pubs/ib_1-02.html). Accessed 05/07/02.
- <sup>2</sup> 2000 Teen Birth Rates (Provisional), Females 15-19. 2002. State Center for Health Statistic, New Mexico Vital Records and Health Statistics, Department of Health.
- <sup>3</sup> European Approaches to Adolescent Sexual Behavior and Responsibility. 1999. Advocates for Youth.
- <sup>4</sup> General Facts and Stats. 2002. National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. <http://www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/data/gen1fact.asp>. Accessed 5/16/02.
- <sup>5</sup> Adapted from Halfway There: A Prescription for Continued Progress in Preventing Teen Pregnancy. 2001. National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.



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First printed in "Improving Our Health Odds" column, *Round the Roundhouse*, May 2002. Logo designed by Norma Vasquez, former NMDOH employee. For more information contact Barbara Chatterjee at (505) 476-3563.

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