



What Docs Should Know About...  
**The Impact of Teen Pregnancy on Young Children**  
[www.docsfortots.org](http://www.docsfortots.org) and [www.teenpregnancy.org](http://www.teenpregnancy.org)



**The teen pregnancy rate in the United States has declined in recent years but many teens are still becoming pregnant with important consequences for their children.**

- The United States has the highest teen pregnancy rate in the industrialized world. Thirty-five percent of girls get pregnant at least once by age 20 in this nation --- nearly 850,000 teen pregnancies annually.
- Teen childbearing costs taxpayers at least \$7 billion each year in direct costs associated with health care, foster care, criminal justice, and public assistance, as well as lost tax revenues.
- Although overall teen birth rates have declined dramatically in the last decade, additional births to teens that are already mothers are disturbingly common; nearly one-quarter of teen mothers have a second birth before turning twenty.<sup>1</sup>

**Teen pregnancy has important implications for their children's health and development.**

- The children of teen mothers are more likely to be born prematurely and at low birthweight.<sup>2</sup> Low birthweight raises the probabilities of infant death, blindness, deafness, chronic respiratory problems, mental retardation, mental illness, and cerebral palsy; low birthweight doubles the chance that a child will later be diagnosed as having dyslexia, hyperactivity, or another disability.
- Children of teen mothers do worse in school than those born to older parents. They are 50 percent more likely to repeat a grade, are less likely to complete high school than the children of older mothers, and have lower performance on standardized tests.<sup>3</sup>
- The children of teen parents also suffer higher rates of abuse and neglect than would occur if their mothers had delayed childbearing.<sup>4</sup>
- The sons of teen mothers are 13 percent more likely to end up in prison.<sup>5</sup>
- The daughters of teen parents are 22 percent more likely to become teen mothers themselves.<sup>6</sup>

**Teen pregnancy and childbearing is closely tied to poverty.**

- Two-thirds of families begun by a young unmarried mother are poor.<sup>7</sup> Almost one-half of all teen mothers and over three-quarters of unmarried teen mothers began receiving welfare within five years of the birth of their first child.<sup>8</sup>
- If teen birth rates had not declined over the past decade, 460,000 more children would have lived in poverty, with 80 percent of these under age six. This decrease accounts for a 26 percent reduction in the number of children under age six living in poverty.<sup>9</sup>

**Preventing teen pregnancy and supporting teen parents is critical to improving overall child well-being.**

**How Can Docs Help?**

- Support parents and encourage them to talk to their children about sex, love, and relationships. Offer literature and information on the important role parents play in preventing teen pregnancy. Teens themselves report that parents most influence their decisions about sex -- far more than their friends or the media.
- Talk with teen parents about practicing safer sex and making responsible decisions.
- Provide information to teen parents on child development, parenting skills, and social services they may be eligible for such as welfare and child care assistance, WIC, and Head Start. See *What Docs Should Know About...Child Care, WIC and Head Start*, [www.docsfortots.org](http://www.docsfortots.org).
- Contact Docs For Tots ([dft@docsfortots.org](mailto:dft@docsfortots.org)) for help in advocating for policies, programs, and funding that prevent teen pregnancy and support teen parents in raising healthy children.
- Check out [www.teenpregnancy.org](http://www.teenpregnancy.org) for information on effective teen pregnancy prevention programs and information on current legislation to support this issue.

**Additional Resources for Docs**

- The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, [www.acog.org](http://www.acog.org)
- National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, [www.teenpregnancy.org](http://www.teenpregnancy.org)
- National Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Parenting, and Prevention, Inc., [www.noappp.org](http://www.noappp.org)

Source: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, [www.teenpregnancy.org](http://www.teenpregnancy.org)

<sup>1</sup> Klerman, L.V. (2004). *Another Chance: Preventing additional births to teen mothers*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

<sup>2</sup> Ventura, S.J., Martin, J., Mathews, T.J., & Clarke, S. (1996). Advance report of final natality statistics, 1994. *Monthly Vital Statistics Report*, 44(11), Suppl., 1-88; Maynard, R.A. (Ed.). (1996). *Kids having kids: A Robin Hood Foundation special report on the costs of adolescent childbearing*. New York: Robin Hood Foundation.

<sup>3</sup> Maynard, R.A. (Ed.) See also Haveman, R.H., Wolfe, B., & Peterson, E. (1997) Children of early childbearers as young adults. In Maynard, R. (Ed.), *Kids having kids: Economic costs and social costs of teen pregnancy*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.

<sup>4</sup> George, R.M., & Lee, B.J. (1997). Abuse and neglect of the children. In Maynard, R. (Ed.), *Kids having kids: Economic costs and social costs of teen pregnancy* (pp.205-230). Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.

<sup>5</sup> Maynard, R.A. See also Haeman, R.H., Wolfe, B., & Peterson, E. (1997)

<sup>6</sup> Terry, E. & Manlove, J. (2000). *Trends in sexual activity and contraceptive use among teens*. Washington, DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

<sup>7</sup> National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy President Isabel Sawhill analysis of the 1999 Current Population Survey, a monthly survey of about 50,000 households conducted by the Bureau of the Census for the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Congressional Budget Office. (1990, September). *Sources of support for adolescent mothers*. Washington, DC: Author. See also Jacobson, J., & Maynard, R. (1995). *Unwed mothers and long-term dependency*. Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research.

<sup>9</sup> National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. (2004). *What If: How Declines in Teen Births Have Reduced Poverty and Increased Child Well-Being*: Author.