



Teen Pregnancy

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How frequent is teen pregnancy?

- 35% of women under the age of 20 become pregnant at least once; this amounts to about 850,000 pregnancies each year.⁷
- 78% are unintended.⁵
- 20% of teenage girls who become sexually active become pregnant within the first month and 50% become pregnant after six months.⁸
- The United States has the highest rates of teen pregnancy and birth of the industrialized world.⁴
- The teen birthrate has declined by 31% for 15- to 19-year-olds between the years of 1991 and 2002.⁷

What ethnic groups are affected?

- Black women have experienced the largest decline since 1991, but their rate of teen pregnancy still remains higher than that of white women.⁷
- The pregnancy rate among Latinas has also declined, but despite this fact, Hispanic teens currently have the highest teenage birth rate.⁷

What decisions do teen parents face?

A. Marriage

"At first I thought, 'Okay, I'll just get married; we'll find a place to live. If I have to, I'll work, and together we can work everything out and live happily ever after.' I honestly thought that! It never once occurred to me that he might leave me." (Jenny)¹¹

"In April I finally found out I was having boys. When I told my boyfriend he told me he was happy. Then we stopped seeing each other, and he stopped coming over. I remember I used to want him to touch my stomach every time I saw him. I wanted him to feel them move. From the fifth month on their dad wasn't around any more." (Dara)¹⁰

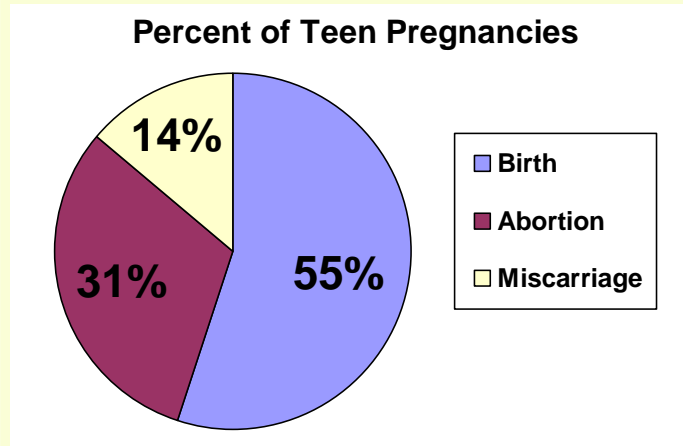


- In 1996, 76% of births were to unmarried teens, and this number continues to rise.⁵
- 51% of teens believe they would marry the mother or father in the case of pregnancy. Instead 75% of teens ages 15 to 19 are unmarried by the time their pregnancies are resolved.⁶

B. Abortion

"I thought a lot about what others would say. My parents wanted me to get an abortion and thought nothing of it. My boyfriend's parents wanted me to keep it. My friends all thought it was all cool and stuff but would think differently if I got an abortion. [I was] all confused and didn't know what I wanted." (Brandy)¹⁰

- Only about 55% of 450,000 actually give birth. The other 45% of pregnancies result in abortions or miscarriages.⁵
- Teens account for one in four abortions in the United States or for about 166,000 abortions per year.⁸
- Despite these high abortion rates, there has been a decline in abortion since 1990.⁵
- Teenagers cite concerns about how a baby would change their lives, feelings that they are not mature enough to have a child, and financial problems as the top three reasons for abortion.⁵
- 40% occur without parental knowledge or consent.⁸
- Though only 31% of teens believe they would consider an abortion; in fact about 40% of teens have abortions.⁶



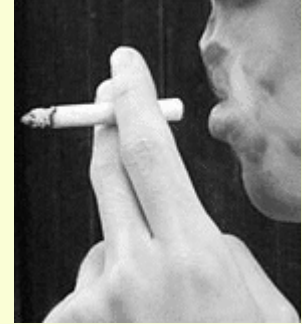
C. Adoption

- Less than 10% of babies born to unmarried teenagers are placed for adoption.⁵

What consequences do teen parents face?

A. Health

- Some teens try to hide their pregnancy, which can result in infanticide.⁸
- Many teens practice unhealthy habits ranging from poor diet, smoking, alcohol consumption, and drugs, all of which impact the health of the baby.⁴
- One-third of teenage mothers do not receive proper prenatal care.⁵
- Teen mothers are less likely to gain enough weight during pregnancy.⁴
- Teenage mothers have an increased risk of premature labor, anemia, and high blood pressure.⁴
- Babies born to teenage mothers often have a low birth weight, which can lead to respiratory distress syndrome, bleeding in the brain, vision loss and serious intestinal problems.⁴
- Teens having sexually transmitted diseases may transmit them to their babies or even cause maternal death or death of the infant.⁴
- The infant mortality rate of children born to teenage mothers is a full 50% higher than to those born to women older than 20.⁵



B. Educational

"I ended up dropping out of school to work full time. I worked two jobs the whole time I was pregnant. And saved as much as I could." (Brandy)¹⁰

"After I had [my baby] I lived off of my savings so I could be home with him, but it soon ran out and I had to go back to work. It's hard getting a job when you're so young, and being a high school drop out was not helping either." (Jenny)¹¹

- Only 70% of teen mothers eventually graduate from high school, compared with 94% of their childless peers.⁴
- Only 1.5% of teen mothers receive a college degree by age 30.⁷
- Teen fathers tend to complete fewer years of schooling.⁵
- Children of teenage parents are less likely to receive enough cognitive and social stimulation.⁵
- Children of teenage parents are at a high risk for problems ranging from lower intellectual and academic achievement to behavioral problems.⁵
- Children of teenage parents are less likely to graduate from high school.⁵

C. Financial

"[My boyfriend] and I were always fighting. He never saved his money and was only working one job. He would always be high or drunk with his friends. ... and I was always working my butt off." (Brandy)¹⁰

- Teen mothers are more likely to live in poverty than those women who delay childbearing.⁴
- Even though only 26% of teens believe they would need to go on welfare if they became pregnant, in reality nearly 80% of teen mothers eventually go on welfare.⁶
- Teenage mothers often end their education early and thus often lack job skills.⁴
- Compared to fathers aged 20 to 21, teenage fathers earn an average of \$3,400 less per year over the course of 18 years after the child's birth.⁵

D. Child's Future

- They are at greater risk of abuse and neglect than their peers.⁷
- They are more likely to be unemployed.⁵
- The sons of teen mothers are 13% more likely to end up in prison.⁷
- Daughters of teen mothers are 22% more likely to become teen mothers themselves.⁷

E. Emotional

"I think I cried every night of my pregnancy. I felt a roller coaster of emotions: happy, excited, anxious, scared, betrayed, angry, confused, and then alone. I think the emptiness I felt at the end was the worst feeling of all. No one to share this 'beautiful' time of my life with—no friends, no supporting family, no boyfriend. For nine months the only person I had to talk to was the unborn child in my growing belly." (Jenny)¹¹

"I was scared. I didn't want to tell my parents. I didn't know what their reactions would be." (Katie)⁹

- Initial shock and denial are common reactions.
- Panic and desperation can result from the many decisions pregnant teens face.
- Strong mood swings and abnormal reactions can occur.
- Conflict with loved ones, resulting from anger, hurt, or disapproval—or from fear of these reactions—can contribute to serious emotional distress.
- Teens pregnancies that are unplanned may lead to impulsive decision-making. Pressures from parents, peers, society, and school have an impact on the decisions teens make.⁹

What factors contribute to teen pregnancy?

Improper use of contraceptives

- As of 1995, only 30% of teens ages 15 to 19 use contraceptives.⁸
- Teenagers are less likely than older women to use contraceptives consistently or at all.⁸
- Among teenage girls ages 15 to 17 using oral contraceptives, 17% missed two or more pills over the course of three months.⁸
- Imperfect use and inherent failures of each method of contraception contribute to the fact that 43% of teen pregnancies occur while using contraception.⁸



Lack of access to contraceptives

- Teens, particularly those from lower income families, sometimes lack access to contraceptives.²

Societal factors

- While media and pop culture images glorify sex and ignore responsibility for sexual activity, American culture simultaneously discourages open discussion and restricts access to resources.²
- Other industrialized countries have much lower teen pregnancy rates than the United States because they 1) provide clear information; 2) provide access to contraceptives and abortion; 3) find abortion socially acceptable; 4) view adolescent sexual expression as normal and healthy; and 5) give teens a consistent message.^{2,5}

Education factors

- Poor school performance correlates with higher risk of teen pregnancy.²
- Higher levels of parental education are associated with lower chances of teen pregnancy.¹

Socioeconomic factors

- Poverty is linked with earlier sexual activities among adolescents.²
- Growing up in a single parent household increases likelihood of teen pregnancy.²
- Teens who see little hope in the future for a good job, secure income, and marriage have little incentive to avoid pregnancy—even if they don't intend to have a baby.²
- Medicaid policies usually do not pay for abortions but *do* pay for childbirth. This may explain why teens whose families live in poverty terminate their pregnancies less often.²

Lack of communication with parents

- 78% of white and 70% of African-American girls report that lack of communication with parents about sexual issues is the primary factor contributing to teen pregnancy.¹

Modeling from family members

- Sexual behaviors of mothers when they were young may be similar to their child's behaviors. Thus if the mother begins sexual experiences at an early age, their child is likely to do the same, especially if the child is a girl.¹
- Having a sister who has become pregnant is correlated with increased risk of becoming pregnant.²

Sexual abuse and coercion

- Many girls who have sex before age 15 are victims of incest or other sexual abuse.²
- Half of the fathers of babies born to women aged 15-17 are 20-years-old or older, yet few are prosecuted for sexual relations with a minor.²
- Adolescent girls who have been sexually abused are more likely to have intercourse before age 15, not use contraceptives, have more than one sexual partner.¹

Age of first date

- Those children who begin dating before the age of 12 are 91% more sexually active before the end of high school. By delaying dating until age 13, this figure decreases to 56%.¹

How can I prevent teen pregnancy?

Use contraceptives. Often times, one form isn't enough.

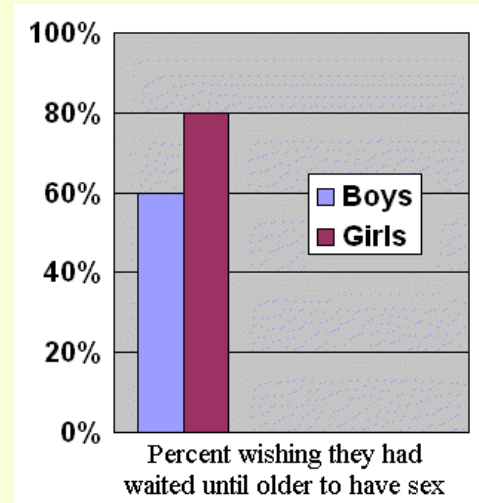
- A sexually active teen who does not use contraception has a 90% chance of pregnancy within one year.⁷
- Experts point to better awareness and use of contraceptives as a major factor in the overall decline of teen pregnancy in recent years.⁵

Wait. Abstain from having sex.

- Most girls and boys who are sexually active wish they had waited. Eight in ten girls and six in ten boys say they wish they had waited until they were older to have sex.⁷

Make sex your choice for your reasons, NOT someone else's.

- Three of four girls and over half of boys report that girls who have sex do so because their boyfriends want them to.⁷
- One of the top reasons teens give for having sex is peer & social pressure.⁸



Define and make clear in your own mind what your moral values are.

- The top reason teenage girls who have never had intercourse give for abstaining from sex is that having sex would be against their religious or moral values.⁷

Communicate with your parents. Express to them your questions or concerns.

- Teens who discuss sexuality topics with parents are more likely to delay sexual intercourse.⁷
- Sexually active teens who talk with their parents are more likely to use condoms and have fewer sexual partners and pregnancies.⁷
- Teenagers who have strong emotional attachments to their parents are less likely to become sexually active at an early age.⁷
- One in two teens consider their parents among the most trustworthy and reliable sources of information on birth control; only 12% say a friend.⁷
- If you are unable or uncomfortable talking with your parents, talk with another adult who you trust.

Involve yourself in the community.

- Teens who connect with their community have a lower chance of being sexually active.³
- Programs, activities, and service opportunities can help build self-confidence and provide you with the chance to interact with others.²

Set goals for the future.

- When teens feel they have positive options for their future, it enhances their motivation to avoid early childbearing.²

Participate in sex education programs.

- Sex education programs have been found to make a difference by encouraging teens to remain abstinent or to use contraception when having sex.³
- Successful programs reach out to all teens. They are 1) directed at delaying the initiation of sexual intercourse, 2) preventing pregnancy for teens who are sexually active, and 3) providing support for those who do become pregnant, including help to avoid additional pregnancies.²
- Sex education programs have been shown to decrease sexual activity and increase the use of contraceptives.²
- A sex education program can provide you with accurate information about sexuality, build your interpersonal and communication skills to resist sexual pressures, and help you recognize social and media influences on sex.²

What can I do if I become pregnant?⁴

"When I first found out I was going to have a baby, I was like, 'I can't have a baby. I'm only 17.' Then I told my mom, and she helped me through the hard time of when I first found out. Now I feel good about the whole thing." (Sue)¹⁰

- Get early and regular prenatal care from a health care provider or clinic.
- Eat a nutritious and balanced diet.
- Do not smoke or use any other drugs, unless recommended by a health care provider who is aware of the pregnancy.
- Do not consume alcoholic beverages.
- Seek support from family, a social worker, hospital professional, or church leader.
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• Where can I find out more about teen pregnancy?

For More Information on Teen Pregnancy

- Campaign for our Children, Inc.: www.cfoc.org
- March of Dimes: www.marchofdimes.com
- Planned Parenthood Federation of America: www.plannedparenthood.org
- SIECUS (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States): www.siecus.org
- Teen Pregnancy Org: www.teenpregnancy.org
- Westside Pregnancy Resource Center: www.wprc.org

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- ¹¹QueenDom. *Nine Months of Solitude*. Available online: http://www.queendom.com/interview/pregnancy_parenting/iwr_pregnancy2.html