

Teen pregnancy prevention programs receives public support

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Every hour in the United States, about 40 children are born to teenage mothers. Americans consistently rate teen pregnancy as one of the top 10 biggest health problems for young people (NPCH Report, [August, 2010](#)) and the U.S. still has the highest teen birth rate among all industrialized countries—despite decreases in the birth rate during the past 20 years.

Births to teenage mothers are a health risk for those mothers and especially for their babies. To address this public health concern, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recently expanded funding for programs to help prevent teen pregnancy.

In a poll released today by the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, the majority of U.S. adults say they strongly

support innovative programs to discourage teen pregnancy, such as requiring teen mothers and fathers to perform community service related to child care.

“Americans see teen pregnancy as a major health problem. They continue to support established ideas such as education about abstinence and birth control. But it is clear that they are ready to move beyond these traditional approaches to teen pregnancy prevention,” says Matthew Davis, M.D., MAPP, director of the poll. “The concept of a community service requirement is that it would allow teens to realize the demands of caring for young children, and to learn about key aspects of child development, enabling teens to be more successful parents.”

Davis says that community service programs also could incorporate on-the-job child care training in supervised environments, offering potential job opportunities to teen parents as well.

Poll results also show that over half of US adults strongly support requiring paternity testing for all pregnancies that use public funds to pay for mothers’ and children’s medical care.

“These results speak to an emerging theme in policies directed toward teen pregnancy—expecting greater responsibility on the part of fathers,” Davis says. “The message from the public is clear: teen fathers should be engaged in ways that make them think about the consequences of teen pregnancy and prepare them to be capable and confident parents.”

Despite political dialogue focused on the high costs of social services, poll results showed that only 30 percent of the public would strongly support a program that would NOT provide welfare support to teen mothers. Rather, the public favors programs that put teen mothers on a pathway out of the welfare system. “Sixty-two percent of adults strongly support ‘teen and tot’ programs in local schools to encourage teenage

moms to finish their high school education,” says Davis, who is also associate professor of pediatrics and internal medicine in the Child Health Evaluation and Research Unit at the U-M Medical School and associate professor of public policy at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy.

Overall, three-quarters of U.S. adults say they are concerned about the problem of teen pregnancy. In states with higher teen birth rates, the public indicates greater concern about teen pregnancy. Says Davis, “[Teen pregnancy](#) is a very visible community issue, and the public continues to view it as a major child health concern —whether for teen parents or for their children.”

The poll also found:

- While two-thirds of adults strongly support teaching abstinence and birth control (67 percent), only 52 percent would strongly support requiring both public and private health plans to cover contraceptives.
- To prevent further teen pregnancies in moms who already have a child, nearly half (47 percent) strongly support providing medical care coverage for teen mothers in order to give advice about birth control and coverage for contraceptive medications.

Facts: Babies born to teen mothers are more likely to be premature and have a low birth weight; they’re more likely to die or be prone to health problems such as bleeding in the brain or learning disabilities down the road. Teen parents risk significant emotional, economic and social hardships for them and their child. Source: March of Dimes.

Provided by University of Michigan

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