

# Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy

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This Evidence to Action brief highlights the risks associated with childbearing during adolescence, for both the mother and the child, and it recommends practical, data-driven actions for reducing pregnancy during adolescence.

Adolescent pregnancy continues to be one of our nation's most challenging issues. In 2009, nearly half of all high school students reported having had sexual intercourse at least once, 7.4 percent reported having sexual intercourse before the age of 13 years, and by the end of high school, nearly two-thirds of students identified themselves as sexually active. Sexual activity exposes adolescents to a number of risks, including HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). For female adolescents, sexual activity also carries the risk of unplanned pregnancy. In 2009, there were more than 400,000 births to adolescents between the ages of 15 and 19 years and 5,000 births to adolescents between the ages of 10 and 14 years. The majority of these births resulted from pregnancies that were unintended. Childbearing during adolescence increases the mother's risk of lower educational attainment, poor mental health, and poverty, as well as health complications during pregnancy. Similarly, children of adolescent mothers are at increased risk of adverse health, educational, and social outcomes both in the short- and long-term including cognitive deficits, behavioral problems, school dropout, and incarceration.

There is a large body of evidence showing the ability of pregnancy prevention efforts to reduce rates of unplanned pregnancies. At the adolescent level, these averted pregnancies carry significant benefits including improved health and well-being outcomes and reduced healthcare utilization related to lower rates of pregnancy, abortion, and birth. With the recent allocation of more than \$150 million to develop and implement teen pregnancy prevention programs under the Consolidated Appropriations Act and the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), it is an opportune time to identify components that contribute to a successful pregnancy prevention effort in order to maximize the beneficial impact of these funds. This PolicyLab Evidence to Action Brief reviews the evidence related to adolescent pregnancy prevention and suggests practical, data-driven action for reducing pregnancy during adolescence.

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## Topics

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