

What is Prevention First Colorado?

Prevention First Colorado is a program and coalition run by NARAL Pro-Choice Colorado Foundation. Our mission is to increase contraception use and reduce unintended pregnancies in the state of Colorado. We believe that every child should be a wanted child, and that everyone should have access to family planning services that allow for reproductive choice, greater economic self-sufficiency, and healthier families.

Teen Pregnancy in Colorado

Approximately 900,000 girls under the age of twenty become pregnant each year in the United States. In Colorado, approximately 12,000 teens get pregnant each year and 7,000 carry the pregnancy to term. Adolescent women have the highest rate of unintended pregnancy of any group; 82 percent of pregnancies among women under age 15 and 78 percent of pregnancies among women aged 15 to 19 are unintended. Among developed nations, the U.S. has unusually high levels of teen births and low levels of contraceptive use among teens. The social costs of unintended pregnancies among teenagers are often more severe than the costs of unintended pregnancy in general. Adolescent women who become pregnant in general have lower educational attainment and workforce participation, higher welfare dependency, and increased poverty. They are also less likely to seek prenatal care and more likely to engage in poor prenatal health behaviors. Children born to adolescent women are at higher risk for low birth weight and neo-natal death. Adolescents face unique barriers to contraceptive use, including fear of parental knowledge of sexual activity, cost and access and transportation. Many adolescents also struggle with mixed messages that create a sense of guilt and confusion regarding sex, which likely contributes to the lack of planning and active decision making that leads to unintended pregnancies for some teenagers.

Prevention First Colorado Program Teen Survey

This survey was distributed to teens aged 15 to 19 through two clinics and one high school parenting program. There were 77 participants, consisting of 68 females and nine males. Nineteen of the respondents were Caucasian, 21 African-American, and 27 Latino. Many of the respondents were either pregnant (18.2 percent) or parenting (27.3 percent) at the time of the survey, probably as a result of the fact that the data was collected at reproductive health care clinics and parenting programs. This survey was conducted to supplement Prevention First Colorado's research into unintended pregnancy among adults.

Survey Findings

Contraceptive Use and Non-Use

- Sixty-seven percent of respondents reported using either condoms or a prescribed method of birth control the last time they had sex. Twenty-two percent of respondents reported using no birth control the last time they had sex. Sixty-five percent of respondents reported using a prescriptive method or condoms regularly, while 17 percent reported using no method regularly.
- Twenty-five percent of respondents had changed methods in the last year. Reasons included changing from having used no method to use a method (and vice versa), wanting to use a more effective method, and not being comfortable with the method they had been using.
- The reasons most cited by teens for not using contraceptives at last instance of sexual intercourse were that they had used the withdrawal method, had been in a monogamous relationship, or were not planning on having sex at that time.
- Respondents who believed that most of their peers used contraceptives were 80 percent less likely to have had sex without contraceptives than those who believed that most of their peers did not use contraceptives.

- The majority of respondents said that both the male and the female are responsible for birth control.
- Fifty-five percent of respondents said that they felt comfortable discussing sex and contraception with their parents, but only 48 percent reported that they actually talked to their parents about these subjects. Seventy-two percent reported that there were adults other than their parents with whom they felt comfortable discussing sex and contraception.
- Teens who had taken a sexuality education class were 14.4 percent more likely to report always using birth control and 12.5 percent more likely to report sometimes using birth control than those who had not taken a sex education class.
- In general, respondents displayed a high level of understanding regarding which birth control methods were effective. However, a significant number identified the withdrawal method as effective and emergency contraception as ineffective.
- Over one quarter of teens surveyed believed in certain myths about sex and contraceptives, such as a woman cannot get pregnant if she is menstruating during sex, that a woman cannot get pregnant if she is “on top” during sex, that birth control can make getting pregnant in the future difficult, and that using birth control pills can cause cancer.

Pregnancy

- Teens who reported sometimes using contraceptives were eight times more likely to be pregnant at the time of the survey than teens who reported that they always used contraceptives. Those who reported never using contraceptives were 9.3 times more likely to be pregnant than those who always used contraceptives.
- Teens who reported that they would be very upset if they found out they were pregnant were 94 percent less likely to be pregnant than those who said that they would be happy if they found out they were pregnant.
- Teens who were required to take a sexuality education class were 79 percent less likely to be pregnant than those who had not taken such a class.
- Teens who reported using birth control every time they have sex were 81 percent less likely to have had an unintended pregnancy than those who said that they had had sex without birth control in the past.
- Teens who reported having no trouble getting transportation to a doctor or clinic where they can obtain contraceptives were 76 percent less likely to have had an unintended pregnancy than those who reported having transportation difficulties.
- Respondents who said that they want children in the future were 4.5 times more likely to have sex without contraceptives when not desiring pregnancy than those who say that they were not sure or do not want children in the future.
- Respondents expressed ambivalence about pregnancy. The majority reported that it was very important that they not get pregnant, but a significant number also said that they would be a little happy or very happy if they found out that they were pregnant.
- Twenty-four percent of teens who already had children were not in school, as compared to nine percent of teens without children. Of those who were still in school, 29 percent of teens with children had doubts as to whether they would finish high school, as compared to only six percent of teens without children. One hundred percent of teens who were pregnant at the time of the survey stated that they would be able to finish high school, indicating that they underestimated the impact that having a child would have on their lives.