



PRESS-REGISTER

Alabama teen pregnancies rise again

Numbers across state jump for 2nd straight year; Mobile figure down for 2007, but Baldwin is up

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Staff Reporter

The number of teenage girls becoming pregnant in Alabama increased for the second year in a row in 2007, according to data from the state Department of Public Health's Center for Health Statistics.

Females aged 10 to 19 accounted for 12,398 pregnancies statewide in 2007, which was up from 12,371 in 2006.

In Mobile County, there were 1,265 such pregnancies in 2007, a slight drop from 1,360 the year before, according to Jamie Keith,

executive director of the Alabama Campaign to Prevent Teen

Pregnancy.

Baldwin County recorded

379 pregnancies among females aged 10-19, a slight increase from 365 the year before, Keith said.

The trend is especially troubling, she said, because between 1996 and 2005, the teen pregnancy rate steadily decreased in Alabama.

Teen mothers are less likely to get prenatal care, finish high school or attend college, Keith said, while their children are at greater risk for being born prematurely and at low weight.

A recent survey from the

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that about 51 percent of Alabama high school students reported having sexual intercourse.

The goal of the Alabama Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy is to raise awareness while encouraging communities to pursue programs that have been proven to reduce risky behavior.

"Certainly abstinence is the best way to prevent teen pregnancy," Keith said, adding that her group also advocates offering information about reproductive health, contraception and sexually transmitted diseases.

"Part of the challenge with pregnancy prevention is to look at this as a health issue and consider the health consequences in engaging in sexual activities," Keith said. "Prevention requires knowledge and skills we would hope that young people are getting."

The death rate for infants born to teenage mothers in Alabama last year was higher than the rate of deaths for babies born to adult mothers.

Joy Logan, executive director of Crittendon Youth Services, was pleased to hear of a drop in teen pregnancies in Mobile County, but she said that the issue of teen sex still needed to be addressed.

Parents "deny the fact that it's going on," she said. "I think it's very hard for parents to look at their children and say they are involved with it."

Crittendon Youth Services offers an abstinence-only education program to area schools known as "Will to Wait."

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