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Teen pregnancy rates on the rise in Elmore County

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The Alabama Department of Public Health says new figures for 2007 reflect that teen pregnancy is on the rise in the state of Alabama.

The number and rate of births and pregnancies among teenage girls in Alabama rose in the past two years, which reverses a decade-long downward trend. According to the Center for Health Statistics of the ADPH, in 2007, there were a little more than 12,000 pregnancies in Alabama to girls ages 10 to 19, a rate of 39.7. That rate is almost the same as the rate for 2006, which was 39.6. In 2005, however, the rate had dropped from 57.1 almost 10 years earlier to 37.5.

It is important to understand how the ADPH arrived at its figures regarding teen pregnancy. The calculations are not percentages, but rates. The way that the teen pregnancy rate is calculated is by taking the number of live births to females ages 10 to 19, plus the number of abortions to females in the same age range, plus the estimated total fetal losses, again for the same age range. That number is then divided by the estimated female population ages 10 to 19 and finally, multiplied by 1,000.

These calculations have concerned state officials because of the obvious trend upwards.

"We are concerned that risky behaviors seem to be increasing among our teenagers," said state health officer Donald Williamson.

An organization that has been working closely with ADPH is the Alabama Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. Jamie Keith, the group's executive director, said his organization's role is to assist state officials.

"We're a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization," Keith said. "We provide leadership and help counties understand the complexities of the issue. We help communities work through the issues."

The ACPT was founded in 1999 and, according to its mission statement, the group attempts to reduce teen pregnancy by serving as a catalyst for the development and implementation of successful programs within the community, which will then improve the well being of Alabama children and families.

Keith's organization, in working with the ADPH, has compiled data that shows that in 2007, along with the increase in teen pregnancy overall in Alabama, Elmore and Autauga Counties have been on the increase as well.

In Elmore County, the number of teen pregnancies for girls ages 10 to 19 was 177. Within that age range, there were 5,018 girls, which equals a teen pregnancy rate of 35.3. In Autauga County, the number of teen pregnancies for girls in the same age range was 138. Within that range, there were 3,574 girls, which equals a teen pregnancy rate of 38.6. In the last 10 years, the teen pregnancy rate for both counties has changed quite a bit. In 1997 in Elmore County, the rate was 60.4, while in Autauga, it was 49.6. The high for Elmore County was in that same year but the high for Autauga was in 1998, with a rate of 55.2. Although the rates have decreased over 10 years, and have stayed almost constant over the last seven years, they are on the increase.

According to Keith, the teen pregnancy rate is important for counties to keep an eye on because of the link between them and the high school dropout rate, welfare dependency and health issues.

"Teen pregnancy and childbearing have significant economic and community costs," she said. "We encourage counties to look at evidence based programs."

Keith feels that her group is making progress by encouraging counties to use other nationwide programs that have successful track records. Two of the things that can also help keep teenage girls from becoming pregnant are the use of athletic programs, and community events that involve youth participation.

Information can be found regarding teen pregnancy rates at www.acptp.org (Alabama Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy) or at www.adph.org.
