

## TEEN PREGNANCY

**PHYSICAL:** The younger the mother is the greater the risk of physical hazards of pregnancy. An adolescent mother's body is not yet mature and is trying to finish its own growth and at the same time support the physical demands of the growing baby. This may wear down the body's resistance to disease. The death rate for the baby during or immediately after pregnancy is twice as high among adolescent mothers than among those between 20 and 24 years of age. The most hazardous risk to the baby is low birth weight (less than 5.5 pounds). These infants frequently have breathing problems and get sick more easily than larger, full-term babies. They have a greater risk of being crippled, retarded, blind, diabetic, and deaf or of having other birth disorders.

Because of all of these reasons, pregnant teenagers especially need good prenatal care. Unfortunately, half of all teenagers neglect to receive medical care during the first four months of pregnancy.

The young mother herself is more likely to suffer from complications of pregnancy. The birth process is very physically demanding and an adolescent mother's body is not prepared to meet those demands.

**FINANCIAL:** Adolescent parents have not yet completed their education and are not ready to financially support a baby, a home, and a spouse. The future careers of the parents are often jeopardized because of the responsibilities now brought on by a baby.

**EMOTIONAL:** The emotional demands of an infant on its parents are incredible. Adolescents are still growing and maturing emotionally and need time to develop themselves before adding the emotional demands of a family. During pregnancy, hormonal swings and mood changes experienced by the mother cause emotional turbulence. The mother's changing body also causes emotional stress. Parents who have matured emotionally are more capable of dealing with these changes. Having a baby who is dependent on them 24 hours a day is difficult because as adolescents they are still searching for their own independence.

**SOCIAL:** A teen's life drastically changes after becoming a parent. Most friends do not want to drag a baby along to activities. The fun, carefree activities, games, movies, and dances will become a thing of the past.

**EDUCATIONAL:** Most teen parents have very limited access to future educational opportunities. College is expensive and child care becomes a problem. Most teen parents will not finish high school. Life is rough in an entry-level job, but without an education, there's little hope of a high-paying career.

**HEALTH RISKS TO A TEENAGE MOTHER:**

1. A teenage mother is more at risk of pregnancy complications such as premature or prolonged labor and dangerous blood conditions such as anemia and toxemia.
2. The death rate from pregnancy complications is higher among girls who give birth under age 15 than among older mothers.
3. Three million teens are affected by sexually transmitted diseases annually. These include chlamydia (causes sterility), syphilis (can cause blindness, death, and death to the infant), and AIDS, which is fatal to the mother and can infect the infant.

**HEALTH RISKS TO THE BABY:**

1. Nine percent of teenage girls have low-birth-weight babies (under 5.5 pounds), compared to 7 percent of all mothers nationally.
2. Low-birth-weight babies may have organs that are not fully developed. This can cause lung problems, such as respiratory distress syndrome, or bleeding in the brain.
3. Low-birth-weight babies are 40 times more likely to die in their first month of life than normal-weight babies.