

Adolescents And Their Families In California's Teen Pregnancy Hot Spots

Findings from The California Wellness Foundation
Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative

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In 1996 The California Wellness Foundation began a 10 year Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative designed to decrease the incidence of teen pregnancies by increasing the proportion of teens who delay the initiation of sexual activity and/or effectively use contraception.

Seven California hot spot communities were selected as target communities to reduce teen pregnancy.¹ These communities included neighborhoods of large cities (Hollywood and South Los Angeles), suburban communities (Oceanside and Richmond) and small cities (Indio, Madera, and Modesto). Some were in southern California, some in northern California, while the rest were in the Central Valley. Surveys were conducted among adolescents and their parents in each of these communities in 1999 to better understand:

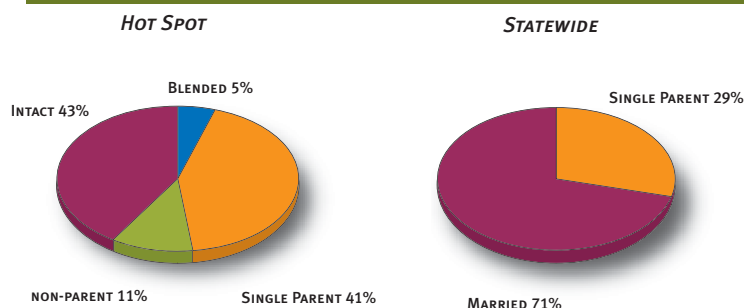
- Who lives in these communities.
- Their support for sexuality education.
- Their communication with one another about sexual behavior.
- The sexual behavior of the adolescents.

Where possible, data from these communities are compared in this brief with the 1999 statewide survey of parents of teenagers conducted by The Field Institute.

Who lives in teen pregnancy hot spot communities?

The teen pregnancy hot spot communities in California are in many ways gateway communities where families struggle with poverty.

- The typical parent² has less than a high school education but at least one adult in the household is employed often in a low-paying job that leaves the family eligible for income supports.
- Many of the adolescents live with only one parent but in a household with an above average number of people.
- Almost all of the households in hot spot communities are either Latino or African-American.



Family composition:

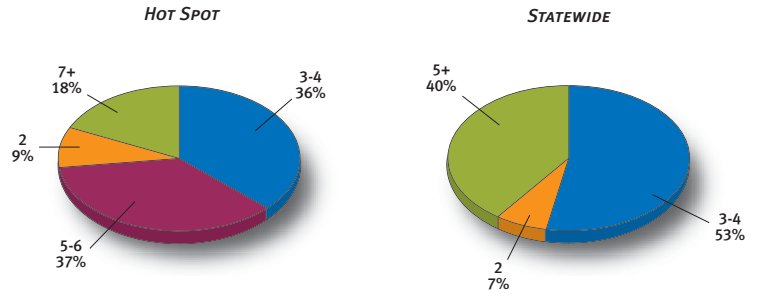
Adolescents in the hot spot communities are more likely to be living with a single parent than are teenagers across the state of California.

¹ Hot Spot communities are the 25% of California ZIP codes that contain the highest rate of births to 15-17 year-olds. (Jeffrey Gould California Potential Project Areas for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Programs UC Berkeley, School of Public Health, 1996.

² The term parent is used throughout this report although 14% of those interviewed in hot spot communities were non-parental caregivers.

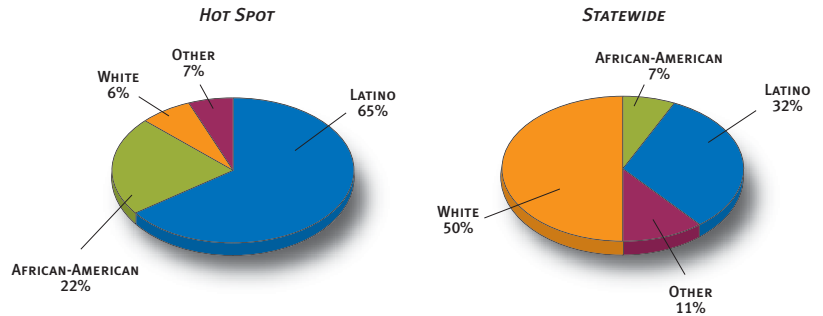
Household size

In hot spot communities, the average size of the households where adolescents live is large. The median household has five persons even though many are single parent families. Almost one in five households include seven or more people. Statewide, the majority of homes where adolescents live have three or four people.



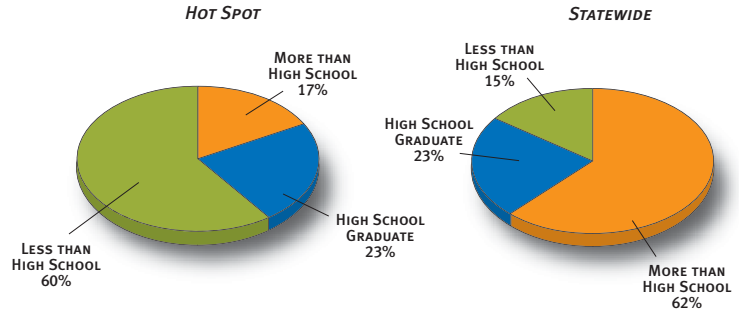
Ethnicity

Families in hot spot communities are much more likely to be members of an ethnic or racial minority. Almost two-thirds are Latinos with most of the rest African-Americans.



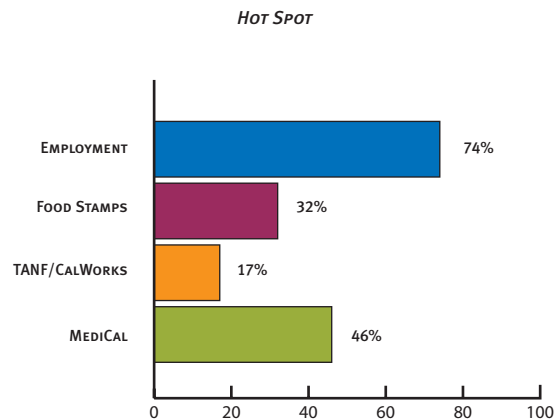
Education

Parents in hot spot communities are less educated than parents across the state of California. The majority (60%) left high school before graduation and only one in six attained any education beyond high school. Just the reverse is true among parents statewide.



Finances

In three-quarters of the households in hot spot communities, there is at least one person employed. At the same time, a third of the households receive food stamps and almost half receive health care through MediCal.



What is their support for sexuality education?

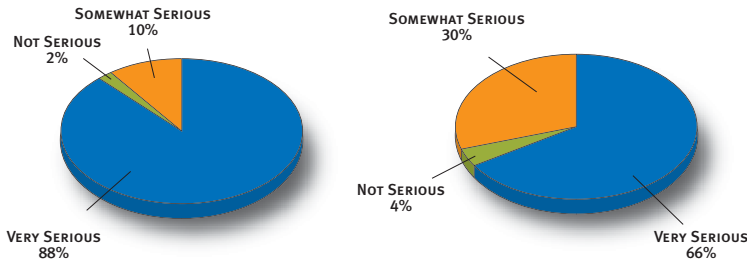
Adolescents and their parents in hot spot communities both believe that teen pregnancy is a serious problem and strongly support sex education in the schools by the sixth grade or earlier. Their support is even stronger than the support of parents statewide.

How Serious is the problem of teen pregnancy?

PARENTS

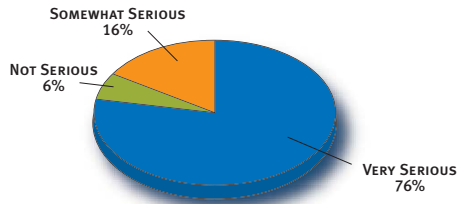
Hot Spot

STATEWIDE



TEENS

Hot Spot



Seriousness of teen pregnancy

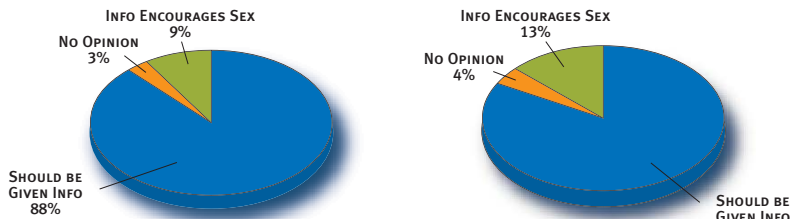
Adolescents and their parents in hot spot communities believe that teen pregnancy is a very serious problem. Almost no one believes that it is not a problem. Parents are more likely than their teens to believe the problem is very serious and both are more likely to believe it than are parents statewide.

Teens should be given information to protect themselves.

PARENTS

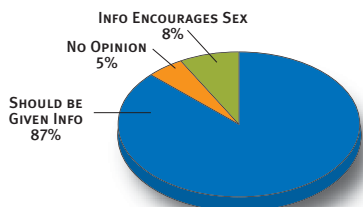
Hot Spot

STATEWIDE



TEENS

Hot Spot



Support for access to information

Consistent with their recognition of the seriousness of the problem, adolescents and parents believe that teenagers should be given information to protect themselves from pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Fewer than 10% of those in hot spot communities believe that giving teens such information encourages them to have sex.

Support for sex education in school

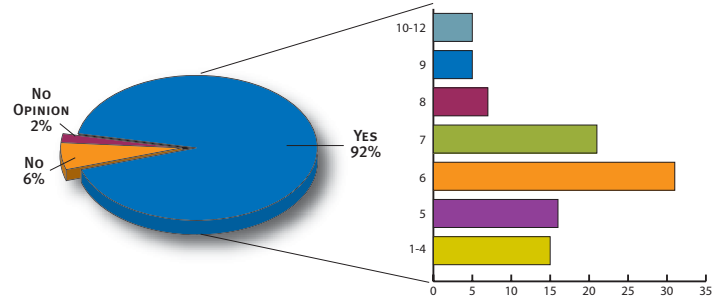
Both adolescents and parents strongly believe that information to protect teens from pregnancy and STDs should be available in school. Almost two-thirds of the parents and more than half of the adolescents believe that students should begin to receive this information no later than the sixth grade. A third of the parents and a quarter of the adolescents believe this information should begin even earlier. Support for sex education is strong statewide and even stronger in hot spot communities.

Teens should receive sex education in school?

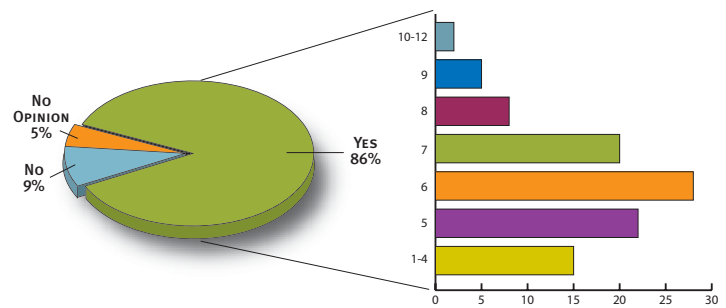
Starting in grade(s):

PARENTS

HOT SPOT

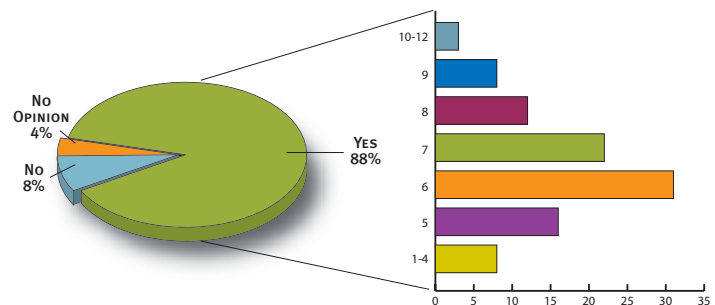


STATEWIDE



TEENS

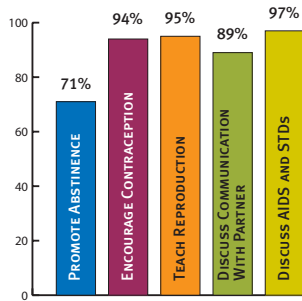
HOT SPOT



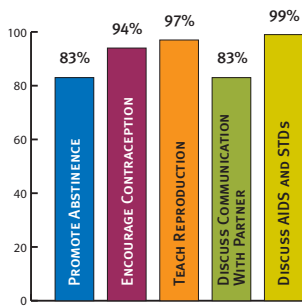
Sex education in high school should...

PARENTS

HOT SPOT

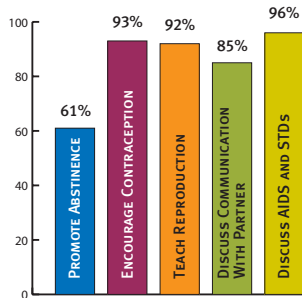


STATEWIDE



TEENS

HOT SPOT



Content of sex-education

There is an almost universal belief among parents and adolescents that sex education in school should:

- Encourage contraception.
- Teach reproduction.
- Discuss communication with parents.
- Discuss AIDS and STDs.

Parents statewide are more likely than parents in hot spot communities to believe that sex education should promote abstinence until marriage.

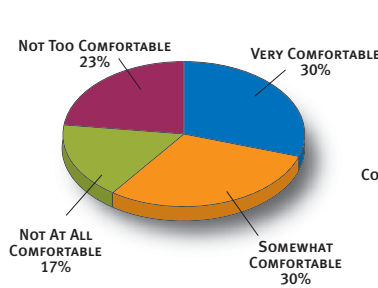
How much do adolescents and their parents communicate about sex?

- Parents report more comfort discussing sex and contraception with their teenagers than teenagers do.
- Parents also are more likely than teenagers to say they have had such discussions.

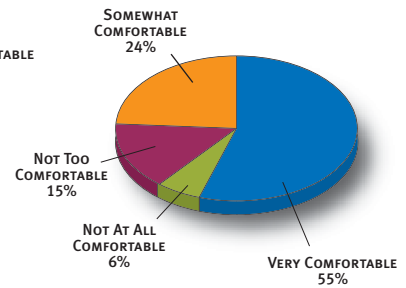
Comfort discussing sex

The majority of parents report they are very comfortable talking about sex with their teenagers, but fewer than a third of the adolescents report they are equally comfortable talking with their parents. Almost twice as many adolescents report they are uncomfortable discussing sex with their parents than parents report discomfort talking with their teenagers.

How Comfortable Talking With Parent About Sex or Sexual Intercourse



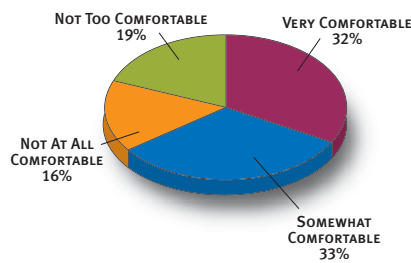
How Comfortable Talking With Teen About Sex or Sexual Intercourse



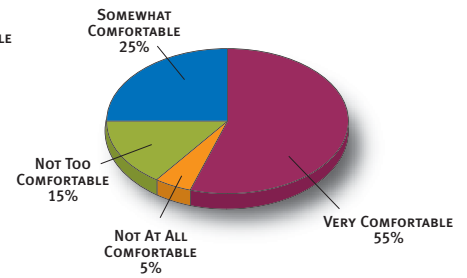
Comfort discussing contraception

Parents also say they are more comfortable talking about contraception with their teenagers than teenagers say they are comfortable talking with their parents.

How Comfortable Talking With Parent About Contraception or Birth Control



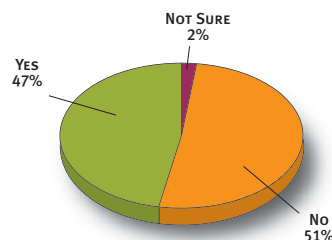
How Comfortable Talking With Teen About Contraception or Birth Control



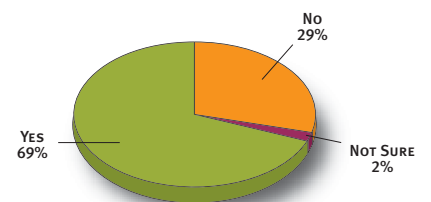
Discussions about sex and contraception

Parents and adolescents disagree over whether they have discussed sex or contraception with one another. More than two-thirds of the parents, but fewer than half of the teenagers, say they have had such conversations.

Ever Talked With Parent About Sex or Birth Control



Ever Talked With Teen About Sex or Birth Control

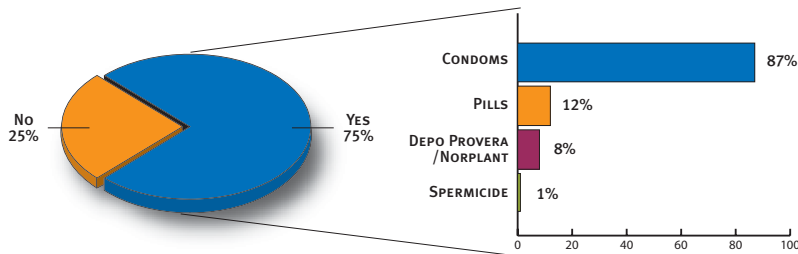


What are the experiences of teenagers in hot spot communities?

The high rate of teen pregnancy in these communities appears to be the result of poor contraception.

- Most (55%) of those who are sexually active fail to contracept at least some of the time—a quarter did not contracept at last intercourse and a quarter do not contracept most of the time.
- As a result, almost half of the sexually active girls have had at least one pregnancy.

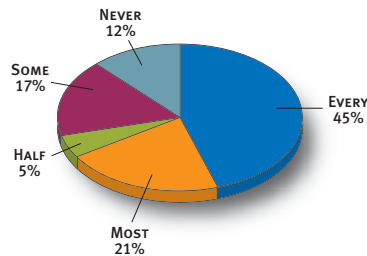
Used Contraception at last intercourse



Contraception at last intercourse

A quarter of the sexually active teenagers did nothing the last time they had sex to prevent a pregnancy. Condoms are the only contraceptives commonly used. More effective means of contraception are rare.

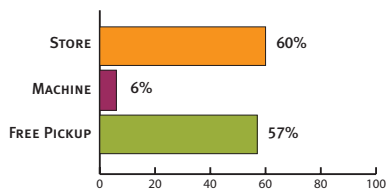
Frequency of Contraception



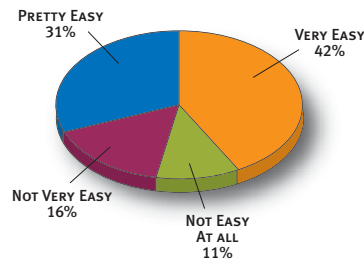
Frequency of contraception

The majority of the sexually active teenagers report having unprotected sex at least some of the time. A quarter have unprotected sex most of the time.

Source of Condoms (Ever Obtained From)



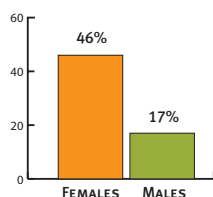
How Easy Is It to Get Condoms



Availability of condoms

Although unprotected sex is common in these communities, three-quarters of the teenagers report that it is very easy (42%) or pretty easy (31%) to get condoms. The majority have both purchased condoms and obtained them for free. Teenagers under the age of 14 were more likely than older adolescents to report that getting condoms was not easy.

Ever been pregnant or caused a pregnancy



Pregnancy

Almost half of the sexually active girls (46%) report they have been pregnant. A much smaller percentage of adolescent males report they have caused a pregnancy.

Implications for Programs and Policy

The information obtained from adolescents and their parents in California's hot spot communities suggests:

Support for comprehensive sex education in school is extremely strong. Almost all adolescents and their parents believe that comprehensive sex education that includes information about contraception as well as abstinence should be taught in school before students enter high school. There is little support for those who would argue that communities are opposed to such education.

Simply encouraging parents to talk with their children about sex is unlikely to have an impact. Most parents believe that they already talk to their children about sex, but many fewer teenagers report such conversations with their parents. Parents say they are comfortable talking with their children about sex and about birth control. This suggests that emphasis needs to be placed on more effective communication if parents are to have a voice in their children's decisions about sex and contraception.

Greater emphasis needs to be placed on encouraging adolescents who are having sexual intercourse to use effective contraception. The majority of sexually experienced adolescents in hot spot communities have unprotected intercourse at least some of the time, although they describe condoms as easily obtained. When they do use contraception, most are using condoms alone. Almost half of sexually experienced girls have had a pregnancy. Adolescents in these communities need to consistently use contraception and use more effective methods of contraception.

The Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative

The Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative is a 10-year, \$60 million grantmaking program of The California Wellness Foundation. The goal of the Initiative is to help decrease the incidence of teen pregnancy by increasing the proportion of teens who delay the initiation of sexual activity and/or effectively use contraception. With input from a variety of constituencies, a comprehensive grantmaking program was designed that includes funding for:

- community action;
- public education and policy advocacy;
- professional development and leadership recognition;
- research, and
- substantial evaluation.

The Survey of Teen Pregnancy Hot Spot Communities

Surveys were conducted in each of the communities targeted by the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative as teen pregnancy hot spots. Random samples were drawn of households and pairs of interviewers screened those households to find where adolescents lived. In households with adolescents a randomly selected adolescent and caregiver (most often a parent) were paid to complete interviews.

Interviewers worked in pairs with one person interviewing the adolescent while the other interviewed the caregiver. Adolescents and caregivers were separated and interviewed simultaneously to reduce the influence one might have on the responses of the other.

Using this procedure, 81% of the randomly selected households were screened and pairs of interviews were completed in 86% of the households where adolescents lived.

The Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative is funded by a grant from The California Wellness Foundation (TCWF). Created in 1992 as an independent, private foundation, TCWF's mission is to improve the health of the people of California by making grants for health promotion, wellness education and disease prevention programs.

The evaluation of the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative is a joint project of Philliber Research Associates, SRI International's—Center for Education and Human Services, and the University of California, San Francisco's—Institute for Health Policy Studies.

For further information on evaluation results of the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative contact

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