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### [Teen pregnancies cost Miss. \\$154 M a year](#)

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Mississippi's teen pregnancies cost taxpayers more than \$154 million annually, a new study says, the greatest losses occurring due to lost tax revenues, incarceration and foster care.

The state has the highest rate of teen pregnancies nationwide, and reducing that percentage is now the top priority of the Women's Fund of Mississippi, the group that released the study conducted by the Mississippi Economic Policy Center.

#### **Mississippi Teen Mom Stat's in 2009**

- > 76 % of high school students say they have had sex by 12th grade
- > State has highest child poverty rate (one in three) nationwide
- > One-third of teen moms earn a high school diploma
- > Children of teen moms are more likely to perform poorly in school
- > Sons of teen moms are 13 percent more likely to be incarcerated; daughters are 22 percent more likely to become teen moms

*Source: Mississippi Economic Policy Center*

In 2009, 7,078 babies were born to Mississippi teen moms, a rate of 64 births per 1,000 teens, as compared to the national rate of 39 births per 1,000.

Regarding favored solutions to the problem, the Women's Fund favors abstinence-plus education in public schools, access to healthcare and contraceptives, access to economic opportunities and

encouragement of parents in their roles as sex educators. The Women's Fund is the only grant-making group in the state solely dedicated to programs for women.

Mississippi has a new law ([House Bill 999](#)) requiring public schools to adopt an abstinence-only or abstinence-plus sex education program by June 2012. The curriculums schools select must be approved the state Department of Health, which will be working in the coming months to vet curriculums submitted by vendors.

The health department has been awarded a \$2.5-million federal grant under the Personal Responsibility Education Program that can assist schools in purchasing and implementing sex ed curriculums. There is one abstinence-only program that has been approved for PREP assistance.

Mississippi First, a nonprofit focusing on state public policy issues, is partnering with the Department of Health in an advisory role and will help provide technical assistance to schools.

Rachel Canter, director of Mississippi First, said abstinence-only programs try to shame kids into not having sex and are not shown to be effective in delaying sexual activity. Abstinence-plus programs contain more medically accurate information, including facts on sexually transmitted diseases and contraceptives.

Studies show that "giving kids all of the information leads to abstinence more than abstinence-until-marriage-only programs," Canter said.

Of abstinence-plus programs, Jamie Holcomb of the Women's Fund said, "Legislators think parents don't want this, but we have found parents do want this."

A teen pregnancy deterrent not mentioned by some advocacy groups is child support program enforcement, a method favored by Rob Wells, president of YoungWilliams Child Support Services, a private law firm headquartered in Jackson that contracts with state government to collect money and promote fatherhood.

All states have federally mandated child support programs per Title IV-D of the Social Security Act. YoungWilliams works with state governments that privatize components of their child support services to make them more effective.

Wells says good enforcement of a child support program deters people having babies they can't afford.

"The focus of the program is for parents to financially support their own children and rely less on government support. A key part is to identify fathers so they will be part of the lives of their children. If done effectively, 'word on the street' ought to be: 'If I don't support my child, the child support program will make me do it. No exceptions,'" he said.

[Mississippi Economic Policy Center](#), [Mississippi First](#), [public schools](#), [sex education](#), [teen pregnancy](#), [Women's Fund of Mississippi](#)

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