

Youth and STDs

I recently read an editorial in the Contra Costa Times that cited a paper from the Public Health Institute at the University of California, Berkeley stating that 20% of youth (age 15-24) in Contra Costa County are reported to having a sexually transmitted disease (STD) (here is the link <http://teenbirths.phi.org/>). If those are the reported cases, we can assume that other instances go unreported by physicians. A Guttmacher Institute study in 2002 found that 13% of 15 year olds report to having had sex. By age 19, 70% of youth have had intercourse. This does not include anecdotal reports of sexual activity by students in middle school.

It is often uncomfortable to talk with our children about sex. Questions arise regarding the appropriate age to have the discussion and what information needs to be shared. Sexual activity is discussed on news and radio shows, as well as, the story lines of soap operas and sitcoms. Even if your child is not having sex, there are peers with whom they have daily contact who are. Parents need to help their children learn to make good choices with regard to sex. The report from the Public Health Institute underscores that consequences of irresponsible sexual activity are great.

In addition to reliable sources such as UC's Public Health Institute, family physicians can be good resources for accurate information. HMOs like Kaiser often have Health Education Departments or Adolescent Medicine Departments. Families that are members of faith communities can work together within those communities to address sexuality from a shared set of values in addition to a health perspective. The school crisis counselors are also available to offer assistance for parents as they guide their children.

by Lance Friis, NHS Crisis Counselor

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