



## Teen Pregnancy Rates Reach Historic Low

Teen pregnancy rates have reached an all-time low, according to the Centers For Disease Control. Arizona has the sixth highest teen pregnancy rate in the country according to a national study.

One teenager is dealing with the realities of pregnancy. “A couple months ago I found out I got pregnant,” said Kayla Krueger.

18-year-old Krueger is showing photos from the 20 week ultrasound of her baby daughter. She lives at Maggie’s Place, a home for expectant mothers who do not have a place to go. She moved in there when she told her family she was expecting.

“When I found out I told my whole family, and they kind of freaked out. There were six people living in our four bedroom house, so I really couldn’t have a baby in that house,” Krueger said.

Krueger was on birth control when she got pregnant. Ironically, teen contraception use is one factor contributing to the drop in pregnancy rates according to Arizona Family Health Partnership’s Bre Thomas.

“We also believe that more teens are using birth control specifically what we call Long Acting Reversible Contraceptives or LARC. LARC is an IUD,” Thomas said.

Thomas said these types of contraceptives are good for teens, because they do not require a lot of maintenance. Prevention has been a factor in the dropping pregnancy rates.

In Arizona sex education is left up to local school districts. Tiffany Arenas is a governing board member of the Creighton Elementary School District.

“Health is definitely a big factor in affecting you academics. If you’re not feeling well, if you’re pregnant, if you’re worried about certain issues in your life, you’re not going to be able to be as successful in the classroom,” said Arenas.

Creighton Schools use the FLASH program which stands for Family Life and Sexual Health. K-8 students will start the program later this school year.

In Arizona, pregnancy rates have dropped among all ethnicities but most significantly among Hispanics. Hispanic teen pregnancies account for 39 percent of teen births. After seeing those numbers, state health officials decided they needed to find a way to reach young Latinos.

“We used the Cuidate curriculum. Cuidate means take care of yourself in Spanish. It is a culturally based curriculum geared towards Latino youth,” said Erica Chavez, prevention coordinator for Touchstone Behavioral Health

She was instrumental in implementing this program in eighth grade at Pendergast and Isaac School Districts.

“So what it does is reframes cultural beliefs so that they support abstinence and safer sex behaviors,” Chavez said.

Cuidate is an opt-in program for eighth grade students, but school is not the only place teens are getting sex education.

“As far as I’m concerned MTV’s “Teen Mom” and “16 and Pregnant” is sex education for the 21st century,” said Bill Albert from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.

A National Campaign survey found 75 percent of teens who watch reality shows “16 and Pregnant” and “Teen Mom” said the show made them think about how the risks of teen pregnancy and how to avoid it, and Krueger agrees.

“I watched those shows even before I got pregnant, and it is kind of like a sex ed. You realize how difficult it is to raise a child on your own,” said Krueger.

During the last five years, the pregnancy rate dropped almost a 30 percent. Bill Albert from the National Campaign said he thinks the recession is a contributor to the sharp decline of teen pregnancy.

“I don’t want to be Pollyannaish here, I am not suggesting that teens check the stock market or their 401Ks before they hop into the sack, and over the past five years the decline in the teen birth rate in this country has been particularly pronounced, and that mirrors a time where the economy was in relative downturn,” said Albert.

Neither the economy nor getting pregnant was on Krueger’s mind five months ago, but now both those issues are front and center.

“I have a lot of people telling me that I can’t do and that I’m not going to be able provide for my child like I want to, but my goal is just to prove them wrong,” said Krueger.

